

A Soul Divided

As a child Marcello Clerici was timid, effeminate and impetuous, with a wild sadistic streak that he recognized and feared. As a man he was determined, secretive and silent. Yet his very self-assurance was a mask to hide the fear that someday he would reveal the viciousness that the years had hidden.

A respected government official and secretly an agent of the Fascist party, Marcello submitted eagerly to every discipline; conformed rigidly to every social convention. His wife Giulia loved him with all the fervor of her sensuous, passionate nature, but Marcello had married her only because she was respectable and commonplace, although her demonstrative affection embarrassed him.

Not until he met Lina, strange and irresistible, did his powerful control crack, releasing all the pent-up horrors of his tormented and divided soul.

"Brings to light the devil in the flesh and in the psyche." —Charles Rolo, *The Atlantic*

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The Conformist

BY ALBERTO MORAVIA

Translated by Angus Davidson



A SIGNET BOOK

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PROLOGUE

CHAPTER 1

MARCELLO, as a child, was fascinated, magpie-like, by objects. It may have been because his parents, from indifference rather than austerity, had never thought to satisfy his instinct for property; it may have been because other instincts, more profound and still vague, were, in him, masked by avidity: but he was continually assailed by furious longings for the most diverse articles. A pencil with a rubber tip, a picture book, a slingshot, a ruler, a portable ebonite inkpot—any sort of trifle served to rouse his mind to an intense and unreasoning desire for the thing he yearned for, and once it had come into his possession, to an astonished, enchanted, insatiable complacency. At home, Marcello had a room to himself where he slept and did his lessons. Here, all the objects spread about on the table or shut up in drawers had, for him, the quality of things sacred, or just slightly desecrated, according to whether they were recent or old acquisitions. They were not, in fact, objects like other objects in the house, but fragments, rather, of something already experienced or about to be experienced, something that was fraught with passion and uncertainty. He was aware, in his own way, of this singular characteristic that property possesses, and while he derived an ineffable delight from it, at the same time he suffered because of it, as he might have suffered over some fault that was continually repeated and therefore allowed no time for remorse.

Of all objects, however, those that attracted him most strongly, perhaps because they were forbidden, were wea-

pons. Not the sham weapons that little boys play with—tin rifles, revolvers that go off with a pop, daggers made of wood—but real weapons, in which the idea of menace, of danger, of death is not confined to a mere resemblance of shape but is the first and last reason of their existence. With a child's revolver you could play at death without any possibility of actually bringing it about; but with grown-ups' revolvers death was not only possible but imperative, a temptation curbed only by prudence. Marcello had, on occasion, held these real weapons in his hands—a shotgun in the country, his father's old revolver which he had shown him one day in a drawer—and each time he had felt a thrill at the contact, as though in grasping the weapon his hand had at last found its own natural extension.

Marcello had numerous friends among the small boys of the neighborhood, and he very soon realized that his taste for weapons had deeper and obscurer origins than their innocent military infatuations. They would play at soldiers with a pretence of ruthlessness and ferocity, but really their interest in the game was love of the game itself and they aped the postures of cruelty, actor-like, without any real participation of feeling. In him just the opposite occurred, it was his ruthlessness and ferocity that sought an outlet in playing at soldiers, or, when there was no game of that kind, in other pastimes falling in with his taste for destruction and death.

Marcello at that time was remorselessly, shamelessly cruel, in a manner that was perfectly natural, for it was from cruelty that he derived the only pleasures that did not seem to him insipid, and this cruelty was still childish enough to arouse no suspicions either in himself or in others. For instance, he would go out into the garden at the hottest time of day, in this time of early summer. It was a small but overgrown garden where a great number of plants and trees, abandoned for years to their own natural exuberance, grew in complete disorder. Marcello would go to the garden armed with a thin, flexible cane that he had torn from an old, broken clothes-beater he had found in the attic, and he would wander around the gravel paths, now in the cheerful shade of the trees,

now in the hot sunshine, examining the plants. He felt his eyes shining, his whole body becoming receptive to a sensation of well-being that seemed to mingle with the general vitality of the exuberant, light-filled garden; he felt happy. But it was an aggressive, cruel happiness, a happiness that was, as it were, desirous of measuring itself by comparison with the unhappiness of others. When he saw, in the middle of a flower bed, a fine clump of marguerites covered with white and yellow flowers, or a tulip with its red cup erect on a green stalk, or a cluster of arums with tall, white fleshy flowers, Marcello would strike a single blow with his cane, making it whistle through the air like a sword. The cane would cut off the flowers and leaves neatly and cleanly and they would fall to the ground beside the plant, leaving the decapitated stalks standing erect. He was conscious, as he did this, of a feeling of redoubled vitality and of the delicious sort of satisfaction that results from an outlet of energy too long suppressed. He felt an indefinable sense of power and of justice. It was as though the plants had been guilty and he had punished them and had at the same time felt that it was in his power to punish them. But he was not entirely ignorant of the forbidden, reprehensible character of this pastime. Every now and then, almost in spite of himself, he would cast furtive glances at the villa, fearful that his mother might be watching him from the drawing-room window, or the cook from the kitchen. And in a confused way he was aware that it was not only the scolding he dreaded, but the mere witnessing of acts which he himself realized to be abnormal and mysteriously imbued with guilt.

The transition from flowers and plants to living creatures was imperceptible, as it is in nature. Marcello could not have said when it was that he discovered that the same pleasure he derived from smashing plants and cutting the heads off flowers could be found, even more intensely and profoundly, by inflicting the same kind of violence on living creatures. It may have been mere chance that encouraged him along this road—a stroke of his cane which, instead of maiming a shrub, smote the back of a lizard lying asleep on a branch; or it may have

been incipient boredom and satiety that put into his head the idea of searching for new material on which to exercise his still unconscious cruelty. However that may be, one quiet afternoon when everyone in the house was asleep, Marcello found himself, as though smitten by a lightning flash of remorse and shame, face to face with a slaughtered mass of lizards. There were five or six of them he had managed to hunt out, by various methods, on the branches of trees or the stones of the garden wall, striking them down with a single blow of his cane just at the moment when, becoming suspicious of his motionless presence, they sought to flee for shelter. How he had reached this point he could not have said, or rather he preferred not to remind himself of it; but now it was all over, and nothing remained but the burning sunlight striking impurely upon the bleeding, dust-soiled bodies of the dead lizards. He was standing in front of the cement footpath where the lizards lay, his cane grasped firmly in his fist; and he still felt, all through his body and in his face, the excitement that had filled him during the slaughter—no longer pleasantly glowing, as it had been then, but already becoming tainted with remorse and shame. He was aware, too, that on this occasion there was not only the usual feeling of cruelty and power but an additional, special agitation that was new to him and inexplicably physical; and, as well as shame and remorse, he had a vague feeling of alarm.

He felt as though he had discovered within himself a characteristic that was completely abnormal, a characteristic that he ought to be ashamed of, that he must keep secret so as not to be ashamed of it in front of others as well as in himself, because it might result in cutting him off forever from the society of those his own age. There was no doubt of it, he was different from the boys of his own age, who for their part did not spend their time, either together or by themselves, in pursuits of this kind; and not only different, but different in a most uncompromising manner. For the lizards were dead, of that there could be no doubt; and their death, and the cruel, crazy acts he had performed in order to bring it about, were irreparable. He *was*, in fact, those acts, just as in the

past he had been other, entirely innocent and normal acts.

To prove the truth of this new and painful discovery of his own abnormality, Marcello was anxious to compare notes with a little friend of his, Roberto, who lived in the house next door. In the late afternoon Roberto, having finished his lessons, used to come down into the garden, and from then until supper time, by mutual agreement of their families, the two boys used to play together, sometimes in one garden, sometimes in the other. Through all the long, silent afternoon, alone in his room, lying on the bed, Marcello waited impatiently for this moment. His parents had gone out and there was no one in the house except the cook, whom he could hear from time to time humming gently to herself in the kitchen on the ground floor. Usually in the afternoon he worked or played by himself in his own room; but on this day neither work nor play attracted him; he felt incapable of doing anything and at the same time furiously impatient of doing nothing; and he was paralyzed and irritated both by his alarm at the discovery he thought he had made and by his hope that that alarm would be dissipated by his coming meeting with Roberto. If Roberto told him that he, too, often killed lizards and that he liked killing them and saw no harm in killing them, then, it seemed to him, all feelings of abnormality would vanish and he would be able to regard his slaughter of the lizards with indifference, as an incident without significance and without consequences. He could not have said why he attributed so much authority to Roberto; vaguely he thought that if Roberto also did things like that and in the same sort of way and with the same feelings, that meant that everybody did them, and what everybody did was normal or right. These reflections were not very clear in Marcello's mind and they presented themselves more in the guise of feelings and profound impulses than as precise thoughts. But of one fact he felt he was sure: his tranquillity of mind depended on Roberto's answer.

In this state of hope and alarm he waited impatiently for the afternoon to end. He was almost falling

when a long, modulated whistle from the garden reached his ears: it was the agreed signal by which Roberto gave notice of his presence. Marcello rose from his bed and without turning on the light went out of the room, down the stairs and out into the garden, in the semidarkness of sunset.

The trees stood motionless and frowning in the dim summer twilight; beneath their branches the shadow was already the darkness of night. The breath of flowers, the smell of dust, waves of heat rising from the sun-soaked earth hung in the still, heavy air. The railings that divided Marcello's garden from Roberto's were completely invisible beneath an enormous blanket of ivy, thick and deep, like a superimposed wall of leaves. Marcello went straight to a corner at the far end of the garden where the ivy and the shadows were thickest, jumped up onto a big stone, and with a single, deliberate movement thrust aside a mass of the creeper. It was he who had invented this little peephole in the foliage of the ivy, and it gave him the feeling of a secret, adventurous game. When he had pushed the ivy aside, he could see the bars of the railings, and between the bars, the delicate, pale face, crowned with fair hair, of his friend Roberto. Marcello stood on tiptoe on the stone and asked, "Nobody's seen us, have they?"

It was the opening formula of this game of theirs. Roberto answered, as though reciting a lesson, "No, nobody. . . ." And then, after a moment, "Have you been working?"

He spoke in a whisper—also part of the agreed procedure. Marcello, also whispering, replied, "No, I haven't done any work this afternoon . . . I didn't feel like it . . . I shall tell my governess I felt ill."

"I wrote out my Italian exercise," Roberto murmured, "and I did one of the arithmetic problems, too . . . I've still got another one to do. Why didn't you do any work?"

This was the question Marcello had been waiting for. "I didn't do any work," he answered, "because I was hunting lizards."

He was hoping that Roberto would say, "Oh really . . . I hunt lizards too sometimes," or something of that kind.

But Roberto's face displayed neither complicity nor even curiosity. So he added, with an effort, trying to conceal his own embarrassment, "I killed them all."

Roberto prudently asked, "How many?"

"Seven altogether," replied Marcello. And then, with a forced swagger of a technical, informative kind, he went on: "They were on the branches of the trees and on the stones . . . I waited till they moved and then got them on the wing—with a single stroke of this cane—one stroke each." He made a grimace of satisfaction and showed the cane to Roberto.

He saw the other boy look at it with a curiosity not unmixed with a kind of wonder. "Why did you kill them?" he asked.

"Well. . . ." He hesitated, and was on the point of saying, "Because I enjoyed it." Then, without knowing why he forebore, and answered, "Because they do harm . . . Didn't you know that lizards do harm?"

"No," said Roberto, "I didn't know . . . do harm to what?"

"They eat the grapes," said Marcello. "Last year, in the country, they ate up all the grapes on the pergola."

"But there aren't grapes here."

"Besides," he went on, without bothering to take up the objection, "they're vicious. One of them, when it saw me, instead of escaping, came at me with its mouth wide open . . . If I hadn't stopped it in time, it would have jumped right on to me. . . ." He was silent for a moment, and then, in a more confidential way, added "Haven't you ever killed any?"

Roberto shook his head and answered: "No, never." Then, lowering his eyes, with a grieved look on his face: "I've been told not to hurt animals."

"Who told you?"

"Mummy did."

"People tell you all sorts of things. . . ." said Marcello, getting less and less sure of himself, "but you try silly . . . I tell you it's fun."

"No, I shan't try."

"Why?"

"Because it's bad."

So there was nothing to be done, thought Marcello, disappointed. A surge of anger rose in him against the friend who, without knowing it, was nailing him down to his own abnormality. He managed to control himself and suggested, "Look, I'm going to have another lizard hunt tomorrow . . . If you come and hunt with me, I'll make you a present of that pack of cards for the 'Merchant at the Fair.'"

He knew that this was a tempting offer to Roberto, who had several times expressed his desire to possess that pack of cards. And indeed Roberto, as if illuminated by a sudden inspiration, replied, "I'll come and hunt with you on one condition: that we catch them alive and put them in a box and then let them go again . . . and you must give me the pack of cards."

"No, no, that won't do," said Marcello, "the best part of the game is knocking them out with this cane . . . I bet you couldn't do it."

The other boy said nothing. Marcello went on, "All right, come on, then . . . that's agreed . . . but you must try and find a cane for yourself."

"No," said Roberto obstinately, "I shan't come."

"But why? It's quite new, that pack of cards."

"No, it's no use," said Roberto, "I'm not going to go killing lizards . . . not even if—" he hesitated, trying to think of some object of proportionate value—"not even if you give me your pistol."

Marcello saw there was nothing to be done, and suddenly gave way to the anger which had for some moments been boiling in his breast. "You don't want to because you're a coward," he said, "because you're afraid."

"Afraid? Afraid of what? You make me laugh."

"You're afraid," repeated Marcello angrily, "you're a rabbit . . . just a rabbit." Suddenly he thrust his hand through the railing and seized his friend by the ear. Roberto's ears were prominent and red, and it was not the first time that Marcello had seized hold of them; but never had he done so with such violence and with so clear a desire to hurt. "Confess you're a rabbit."

"No, let me go," the other boy began to cry out, twisting himself about, "Ooh . . . ow."

"Confess you're a rabbit."

"No . . . let me go."

"Confess you're a rabbit."

In his hand Roberto's ear was burning hot and sweaty; tears appeared in the blue eyes of the victim. He stammered out: "Yes, all right, I'm a rabbit"; and Marcello immediately let him go. Roberto jumped down from the railing and ran away, shouting, "I'm not a rabbit. . . . While I was saying it I was thinking: I'm *not* a rabbit . . . I fooled you all right." He disappeared, and his voice, tearful and derisive, was lost in the distance, beyond the shrubbery of the adjoining garden.

This conversation left Marcello with a feeling of deep discomfort. Roberto had not only refused him his support but had also denied him the absolution he was seeking and which seemed to him to be bound up with that support. Thus he was thrust back into his abnormality; but not without having first shown Roberto how important it was to him to escape from it, or without having given way—as he perfectly well realized—to both falsehood and violence. And now, to his shame and remorse at having killed the lizards was added the shame and remorse of having lied to Roberto about the reasons that had prompted him to invite his co-operation, and at having betrayed himself by that angry movement, when he had seized hold of him by the ear. To his first feeling of guilt was added a second, and he was unable to rid himself of either.

Now and then, as he reflected bitterly over these things, his memory went back to the slaughter of the lizards, in the hope, almost, that he might find it to be purged of all remorse, to be a simple fact like any other. But he realized at once that what he wanted was that the lizards should not be dead; and at the same time he was conscious again of that physical excitement and agitation he had felt while chasing them—a feeling that now came over him violently and perhaps not altogether unpleasantly, but, for that very reason, with all the more repugnance. It was so strong that he even went so far as to doubt whether, during the following days, he could resist the temptation to repeat the slaughter. This thought

terrified him; not merely was he abnormal but, far from being able to suppress his abnormality, he could not even control it. He was at this moment in his own room, sitting at the table with a book in front of him, waiting for supper. He jumped up impetuously, went over to the bed and, throwing himself on his knees on the mat, as he did when saying his prayers, clasped his hands together and said aloud, in a tone of voice that seemed to him sincere, "I swear before God that never again will I touch either flowers or plants or lizards."

Nevertheless the need for absolution that had driven him to seek the support of Roberto still persisted, transformed now into its opposite, into a need for condemnation. Roberto, who could have saved him from remorse by rallying to his side, had not sufficient authority to consolidate the foundation of that remorse and, by a verdict against which there was no appeal, bring order into the confusion that reigned in his mind. He was a boy just like himself, acceptable as an accomplice but inadequate as a judge. But Roberto, in refusing his proposal, had invoked maternal authority in support of his own disgust. It occurred to Marcello to appeal to his mother. She alone could condemn or absolve him and, somehow or other, bring his deed into line with some sort of order. Marcello, who knew his mother, was reasoning from the abstract in taking this decision, which was made in reference to an ideal mother, such as she ought to have been and not such as she was. Actually, he was doubtful of the success of his appeal. But there it was; she was the only mother he had, and besides, his impulse to turn to her was stronger than any doubt.

Marcello waited for the moment when his mother came up to his room to say good night to him, after he had gone to bed. This was one of the few moments when he was able to see her alone: almost always, at meals or during his occasional walks with his parents, his father was present the whole time. Marcello, although he had not, by instinct, much confidence in his mother, loved her and felt for her—even more than love—an admiration of a perplexed and affectionate kind, an admiration such as one might feel for an elder sister of singular

habits and capricious character. Marcello's mother, who had married extremely young, had remained morally and physically a mere girl. Furthermore, although she was not on intimate terms with her son, of whom she took very little notice owing to her many social engagements, she had never made any sharp division between her own life and his. Marcello therefore had grown up in a continual tumult of rushings in and out of the house, of clothes being tried on and cast aside, of telephone conversations as interminable as they were frivolous, of tiffs with dressmakers and shopkeepers, of quarrels with the maid, of ceaseless variations of humor for the most futile reasons. He was allowed to go into his mother's room at any time, an inquisitive and ignored spectator of an intimacy in which he had no place. Sometimes his mother, as though shaken out of her inertia by sudden remorse, decided to devote herself to her son and carried him off with her to a dressmaker or a hatshop. On these occasions, compelled to spend long hours sitting on a stool while his mother tried on hats and dresses, Marcello almost regretted her usual tempestuous indifference.

That evening, as he saw at once, his mother was in even more of a hurry than usual; in fact, even before Marcello had time to overcome his own shyness, she turned her back upon him and was crossing the darkened room toward the half-open door. But Marcello did not mean to wait another day for the verdict of which he stood in need. Sitting up in bed, he called out loudly, "Mummy!"

She turned back from the doorway, with a gesture of annoyance. "What is it, Marcello?" she asked, and came over to the bed again.

She was standing close to him now, against the light, white and slim in her black low-necked dress. Her delicate, pale face, in its frame of black hair, was in shadow—not so much so, however, as to conceal from Marcello its discontented, fidgety, impatient expression. Carried along by his impulse to speak, he announced, "Mummy, there's something I want to tell you."

"All right, Marcello, but be quick about it . . . Mummy's got to go out, and Daddy's waiting." Meanwhile,

her two hands were fumbling at the back of her neck with the clasp of her necklace.

Marcello wanted to tell his mother all about the slaughter of the lizards and ask her if he had done wrong. But his mother's haste caused him to change his mind. Or rather, it caused him to alter the sentence that he had prepared in his mind. It seemed to him all at once that lizards were creatures altogether too small and insignificant to arrest the attention of anyone so preoccupied. There and then, without himself knowing why he invented a lie to increase the importance of his own crime. He hoped, by the enormity of his guilt, to succeed in stirring his mother's feelings, which he divined in an obscure manner, to be obtuse and inert. He said with a sureness that astonished him, "Mummy, I killed the cat."

Just at that moment his mother had at last managed to bring together the two clips of the clasp. With her hands joined at the back of her neck and her chin pressed firmly against her chest, she stared downward and out of impatience beat her heel against the floor. "Oh yes," she said in an uncomprehending voice, as though deprived of all power of attention by the effort she was making. Marcello clinched the matter by saying, in an uncertain tone, "I killed it with my slingshot."

He saw his mother shake her head in annoyance and then remove her hands from her neck, holding in one of them the necklace she had failed to fasten. "This wretched clasp," she burst forth angrily. "Marcello . . . be a good boy and help me with my necklace." She sat down on the bed, slantwise, her back toward the boy and added impatiently, "But mind you make sure that the clasp catches properly . . . otherwise it'll come undone again."

As she spoke she presented her thin back to him, bare to the waist and white as paper in the light that came in through the door. Her slim hands, with their pointed scarlet nails, held the necklace loosely at the back of her delicate neck, where the curly hair shadowed it. Marcello told himself that once the necklace was fastened she would listen to him with more patience; leaning forward

he took the two ends and clicked them firmly together in one movement. But his mother immediately rose to her feet, and bending down and kissing him lightly, said, "Thank you. Now go to sleep . . . good night." And, before Marcello could make a motion or a sound to stop her, she had vanished.

It was hot next day, and the sky was overcast. Marcello, having eaten his food in silence between his two silent parents, slipped stealthily from his seat and went out through the French window into the garden. As usual, digestion brought with it a feeling of torpid discomfort mingled with a heightened and pensive sensuality. Walking slowly, almost on tiptoe, on the crunching gravel, in the insect-humming shade of the trees, he went as far as the gate and looked out. There was the well-known street, sloping slightly, bordered on each side by pepper trees of a feathery, almost milky green. The street was deserted at this hour of the day, and strangely dark by reason of the low black clouds that overspread the sky. Opposite he could see glimpses of other gates, other gardens, other homes similar to his own. After having carefully surveyed the street, Marcello left the gate, took his slingshot from his pocket and stepped down to the ground. There were a number of large, white pebbles among the fine gravel. Marcello picked up one of these the size of a nut, inserted it in the leather pouch of his slingshot and started walking along the wall that separated his own garden from Roberto's.

His idea, or rather his feeling, was that he was in a state of war with Roberto and must keep the strictest possible watch over the ivy that covered the dividing wall and, at the slightest movement, open fire—discharge the stone that he was holding tightly in his slingshot. It was a game in which he expressed his bitterness against Roberto for not having been willing to be an accomplice in the lizard slaughter, and the brutal, cruel instinct that had spurred him on to effect the slaughter itself. Marcello knew perfectly well that Roberto, accustomed to sleeping at that time of day, would not be peeping at him from behind the leaves of the ivy; and yet, although he knew it, he acted in a serious and consequent

tial manner, as though he was certain that Roberto really was there. The ivy, ancient and gigantic, reached right up to the very spike-tips of the railings, and its leaves, overlapping each other, big, black and dusty, like folds of lace on the calm bosom of a woman, hung still and limp in the heavy, windless air. Once or twice it seemed to him that a very faint rustle set the foliage quivering—or rather, he pretended to himself that he had seen this quivering and at once, with intense satisfaction, he discharged the stone into the mass of ivy.

The moment he had fired his shot he bent down hastily and picked up another pebble, then resumed his fighting attitude, legs wide apart, arms braced in front of him, slingshot ready to shoot. There was no knowing, Roberto might be behind the foliage, in the act of taking aim at him and with the advantage of being concealed, whereas he was completely exposed. And so, occupied with this game, he came to the bottom of the garden and to the place where he had cut out the peephole in the ivy. Here he stopped, looking carefully at the garden wall. In his imagination the house was a castle, the creeper-hidden railings its fortified walls, and the little opening a dangerous, easily passed breach. And then, suddenly, and this time without any possibility of doubt, he saw the leaves move from right to left, trembling and shaking. Yes, he was sure of it, the leaves were moving, and there must be somebody there to make them move. All in a single moment it occurred to him that it was not Roberto but was only a game, and that, seeing it was a game, he could shoot off his pebble; and at the same time that it *was* Roberto, and that he must not shoot if he did not want to kill him. Then, with sudden, unthinking determination, he stretched the elastic and discharged the stone into the thick of the foliage. Not content with this, he stooped down, inserted another stone in the slingshot with feverish haste, fired it off, seized a third one and fired that off too. By now he had put aside all scruples and fears, and it no longer mattered to him whether Roberto was there or not; his only feeling was one of hilarious, pugnacious excitement. At last, out of breath, having thoroughly riddled the ivy foliage, he dropped the slingshot and

scrambled up on to the garden wall. As he had expected and hoped, Roberto was not there. But the bars of the railings were very wide apart, making it possible for him to thrust his head through into the next-door garden. Spurred on by a curiosity he did not understand, he bent forward and looked down.

On Roberto's side of the railings there was no creeper but a flower bed full of irises running along between the wall and the graveled path. And then, right under his eyes, between the wall and the row of white and purple irises, Marcello saw a large gray cat lying on its side. A crazy terror made him hold his breath when he noticed the unnatural position in which the animal was lying—stretched flat on its side, with its paws extended and relaxed and its muzzle buried in the soil. Its fur, thick and of a bluish-gray color, looked slightly shaggy and ruffled and at the same time lifeless, like the feathers of dead birds he had sometimes seen on the marble slab in the kitchen. Now his terror increased. He jumped down to the ground, pulled up a stake from the rose bed, clambered up again, and thrusting his arm through the railings, contrived to prod the cat's flank with the earth-point of the stake. But the cat did not move. All at once the irises, with their long green stalks and their white and purple petals curling down round the motionless gray body, seemed to be the badge of death, like flowers arranged by some pious hand round a corpse. He threw away the stake and, without troubling to put back the ivy in its place, jumped to the ground.

He felt himself a prey to all sorts of terrors and his first impulse was to run and shut himself up in a cupboard, or a hidden recess, or anywhere, in fact, where there was darkness and secrecy, so that he could escape from himself. He was terrified, in the first place, because he had killed the cat, and also, perhaps to an even greater degree, because he had announced this killing to his mother the previous evening—an unmistakable sign that he was predestined in some mysterious and fatal way to accomplish acts of cruelty and death. But the terror aroused in him by the cat's death and his own significant premonition of it was far surpassed by the terror inspired

him by the idea that, in killing the cat, he had really intended to kill Roberto. It was by chance alone that the cat was dead in place of his friend. It was a chance, however, that was not devoid of meaning; for it could not be denied that there had been a consistent progression from the flowers to the lizards, from the lizards to the cat, and from the cat to the murder of Roberto which he had meditated and desired but not accomplished, but which could nevertheless be accomplished and was; perhaps, inevitable. And so he was an abnormal being, he could not help thinking—or rather feeling, with a lively, physical consciousness of this abnormality—an abnormal being marked out by a solitary, menacing fate and already launched upon a bloody course in which no human force could arrest him.

These thoughts whirled frantically round in his head as he crossed the brief space between the house and the gate, raising his eyes every now and then to the windows, hoping to catch sight there of the figure of his thoughtless, frivolous mother. Now, however, she could no longer do anything for him, even if she had ever been capable of doing anything. Then, with a sudden flash of hope, he ran down again to the bottom of the garden, climbed up on to the wall and looked through the railings. He almost deceived himself into thinking that he would find the place empty where he had previously seen the dead cat. The cat, however, had not gone away; it was still there, gray and motionless in the midst of its funeral wreath of white and purple irises. And the fact of death was affirmed, with the added, gruesome feeling of a corpse in decay, by a black line of ants starting from the path and crossing the flower bed till it reached the muzzle, or rather the eyes, of the animal.

He watched and, all of a sudden, like a superimposed vision, it seemed to him that instead of the cat he saw Roberto, that it was he who lay among the irises, that it was he who was dead, that it was from his sightless eyes and his half-open mouth that the ants were coming and going. With a shudder of horror he tore himself away from this ghastly contemplation and jumped down. But this time he took care to pull back the mass of ivy

over the peephole. For now, in addition to his remorse and his terror of himself, he began to feel a fear that he might be discovered and punished.

Nevertheless, even while he feared it, he felt that he wanted this discovery and this punishment, if only in order to be stopped in time on the slippery descent at the bottom of which murder seemed to be inevitably awaiting him. Marcello's parents, however, had never punished him, as far as he could remember, not so much because of any educational principle excluding punishing as—and this he vaguely understood—from sheer indifference. And so, to the misery of suspecting himself of having committed a crime and, moreover, of being capable of committing other, more serious crimes, there was added the further misery of not knowing to whom to turn to get himself punished, and of being ignorant even of what the punishment might be. Marcello realized dimly that the same mechanism that had prompted him to confide his guilt to Roberto in the hope of hearing that it was not a question of guilt but of an ordinary thing that everybody did, was now suggesting to him that he should make the same revelation to his parents in the contrary hope of seeing them exclaim indignantly that he had committed a horrible crime that he must expiate with a suitable penalty. Little did it matter to him that, on the one hand, Roberto's absolution would have encouraged him to act in the precise manner which, on the other, would draw down upon him a severe condemnation. In reality—as he understood—what he wanted in both cases was to escape, at all costs and by any means, from the terrifying isolation of abnormality.

Perhaps he might have made up his mind to confess to his parents that he had killed the cat if he had not had the feeling, that same evening at supper, that they already knew everything. In fact, the moment he sat down at the table he noticed, with a mingled sense of alarm and insecure relief, that his father and mother looked hostile and ill-humored. His mother, with a self-conscious, exaggerated expression of dignity on her childish face, sat upright, with downcast eyes, in an obviously scornful silence. Opposite her, his father displayed similar feelings

of ill-humor, by signs which, though different, were no less expressive. Marcello's father, many years older than his wife, often gave his son the disconcerting sensation that he coupled him and his mother together on the same childish, inferior level, as though she were not his mother but his sister. His father was thin, with a lean, furrowed face illumined but rarely by brief bursts of joyless laughter, a face in which there were two noteworthy features that undoubtedly had some intimate connection—an expressionless, almost metallic glint in the protruding eyeballs and a constant twitching of some frenetic nerve beneath the tight-drawn skin of the cheek. Perhaps by reason of the many years he had spent in the army, he had retained a taste for precise gestures, for carefully controlled attitudes. But Marcello knew that, when his father was

ry, precision and control became excessive and were isformed into their very opposite, that is, into a curious sort of contained, methodical violence, aimed at rging the simplest movements with significance.

That evening, at table, Marcello noticed at once that father was sharply emphasizing actions that were ritual and of no importance, as though to call attention to them. For instance, he took up his glass, drank mouthful and then put it back on the table with a bang; he put out his hand for the saltcellar, helped himself to a pinch of salt and as he put it down there was another bang; he seized the bread, cut off a piece, and banged it down on the table. Then, as though seized with a sudden craze for symmetry, he tried with the same brusque movements to place his soup plate so that it was exactly framed by the cutlery, the knife, fork and spoon meeting around it at right angles. If Marcello had been less preoccupied with his own guilty feelings, he would easily have realized that these movements, so charged with pregnant, gloomy energy, were directed not at himself but at his mother—who at each loud noise, jumped herself up, so to speak, in her dignity, with self-satisfied sighs and long-suffering raisings of the eyebrows. Blinded by his own anxiety, he did not doubt that his parents knew everything. Roberto of course, rabbit that he was, had been playing the sneak. Marcello had

wanted punishment, but now, seeing his parents so angry, he was possessed by a sudden horror of the violence of which he knew his father to be capable in such circumstances. Just as his mother's manifestations of affection were sporadic, casual, obviously dictated more by remorse than by maternal love, so his father's severities were unexpected, unjustified, excessive; inspired more by a wish to make up for lost time after long periods of inattention than by any educational intention. Without warning, after some complaint from Marcello's mother or the cook, he would remember that he had a son, would start shouting at him, getting into a rage with him and striking him. It was the blows that frightened Marcello more than anything, because his father wore on his little finger a ring with a massive setting which, during these scenes always happened by some means or other to get turned round towards the palm of his hand, thus adding a more penetrating pain to the humiliating severity of the blow. Marcello suspected that his father turned the ring round on purpose, but he was not sure.

Nervous, frightened, he started with feverish haste to invent a plausible lie: *he* had not killed the cat, it had been Roberto, and the cat was, in fact, in Roberto's garden, and how could he possibly have killed it through the ivy and the garden wall? But he suddenly remembered that he had announced the killing of the cat to his mother the evening before, and it had then happened in actual fact, the next day; and he saw that no sort of lie would be of any use to him. However vague she might be, his mother had certainly passed on his confession to his father, and the latter, no less certainly, had established the connection between his confession and Roberto's accusations; and so there was no possibility of contradiction. At this thought, passing from one extreme to the other, he had a renewed impulse of longing for punishment, provided it came quickly and was decisive. What kind of punishment? He remembered that Roberto had once spoken of boarding schools as places where parents sent undisciplined boys as a punishment, and he was surprised to find himself violently desiring this sort of penance. It was his unconscious weariness of a family life disorderly

and lacking in affection that expressed itself in this desire, causing him not merely to long for something that his parents would consider a punishment, but also inducing him to cheat himself and his own need of that punishment by means of the rather cunning calculations that he would by this method not only allay his remorse but at the same time better his condition. This thought at once brought to his mind pictures that ought to have been disheartening but instead were pleasing to him—an austere, cold-looking, gray building with big barred windows; chilly, bare rooms with rows of beds beneath lofty, white walls; dreary halls filled with benches, with the master's desk at the far end; empty corridors, dark aircases, massive doors, impassable railings—everything, in fact, as in a prison and yet all of it preferable to the treacherous, tormenting, unendurable freedom of his own home. Even the idea of wearing a uniform of striped cloth and having his head shaved, like the boys he had sometimes encountered in "crocodiles" in the streets—even this humiliating, almost repulsive idea became pleasing to him in his present desperate hankering after any kind of order and normality.

As these fantastic thoughts passed through his head he was no longer looking at his father but at the dazzling whiteness of the tablecloth, on which, from time to time, some night insect would drop down that had flown in through the open window to dash itself against the lamp shade. Then he raised his eyes and was just in time to see, right behind his father, on the window sill, the outline of a cat. But before he had been able to distinguish its color, the animal jumped down, ran across the dining room and disappeared in the direction of the kitchen. Although he could not be quite sure, his heart swelled with a joyful hope at the thought that it might be the cat he had seen a few hours before, lying motionless amongst the irises in Roberto's garden. And he was pleased at this hopeful feeling—a sign that, after all, the creature's life meant more to him than his own fate. "The cat!" he exclaimed loudly. And then, throwing down his napkin on the table and stretching out one

leg at the side of his chair, he added, "Daddy, I've finished, can I get down?"

"You stay in your place," said his father in a menacing tone.

Marcello ventured nervously, "But the cat's alive. . . ."

"I've already told you to stay in your place," his father repeated decisively. And then, as though Marcello's speaking had broken the long silence for him too, he turned toward his wife and said, "Well, say something then . . . speak!"

"I've nothing to say," she answered with ostentatious dignity, her eyelids lowered, scorn on her lips. She was in evening dress, in a low-necked black gown, and Marcello noticed that she was holding tightly in her thin fingers a small handkerchief that she raised frequently to her nose, while with the other hand she kept seizing a piece of bread and then dropping it on to the table again but not with her fingers; merely with the points of her nails, like a bird.

"But say what you have to say . . . speak, for goodness' sake."

"To you I've nothing to say."

Only now did Marcello begin to understand that it was not the killing of the cat that had caused his parents' ill humor. And then everything seemed to come to a head. His father repeated once again, "Speak, for God's sake"; his mother's only reply was a shrug of the shoulders, and then his father seized the wine glass that stood beside his plate and, shouting in a loud voice, "Will you speak or will you not?" smashed it down on the table. The glass broke, his father, with a curse, raised his cut hand to his mouth, his mother rose in fright from the table and went hastily toward the door. His father was sucking the blood from his hand almost with enjoyment, arching his eyebrows above his hand as he held it to his mouth; but on seeing his wife going away, he stopped sucking and shouted at her, "I forbid you to go away . . . d'you understand?" The only answer was a tempestuous slamming of the door. His father rose from the table and rushed in the same direction. Excited by the violence of the scene, Marcello followed him.

His father had already started up the stairs, his hand on the banister, without any further bluster or, apparently, any hurry. Marcello, coming behind him, saw that he was mounting the steps two at a time, almost as though he were flying silently towards the landing above—just like, Marcello thought, just like some ogre in a fairy tale wearing the seven-league boots; and he did not for a moment doubt that this calculated, menacing ascent would get the better of the disorderly haste of his mother who, a little higher up, was scurrying up the stairs, one at a time, her legs hampered by her narrow skirt.

"Now he's going to kill her," he thought, as he followed his father. When she reached the landing his mother ran the short distance to her room, but not fast enough to prevent her husband pushing his way in behind her through the half-closed door. All this Marcello saw as he climbed up the stairs with his short, childish legs that allowed him neither to run up two steps at a time, like his father, nor to skip hastily up like his mother. As he arrived at the landing, he noticed the clatter of the pursuit had been succeeded, strangely, by a sudden silence. The door of his mother's room had been left open. Marcello, rather hesitantly, went forward and looked in.

At first all he could see was the two big, diaphanous window curtains at the other end of the almost dark room, one on each side of the wide, low bed; these curtains were streaming into the room on a strong draft, borne up and up toward the ceiling until they almost touched the lamp hanging in the middle. Silent, glimmering white in mid-air in the dark room, they gave a feeling of emptiness, as though Marcello's parents, in their swift pursuit, had vanished from sight through the wide-open windows into the summer night. Then, in the streak of light that came through the door from the passage and reached as far as the bed, he saw his parents. Or rather he saw only his father's back, for beneath him his mother was almost invisible except for her hair spread over the pillow and one arm raised toward the head of the bed. This arm and hand were seeking, feverishly, to grasp the bed rail but without success; and in the meantime his father, crushing

his wife's body beneath his own, was making movements with his shoulders and hands as if he wanted to strangle her. "He is killing her," thought Marcello with conviction, as he stood in the doorway.

He had, at that moment, an unaccustomed sensation—cruel, pugnacious excitement and at the same time a strong desire to intervene in the struggle—though whether to give a helping hand to his father or to defend his mother he did not know. Simultaneously he saw a ray of hope that his own crime might be wiped out by means of this other, far graver crime, for what was the killing of a cat, compared with the killing of a woman? But at a very moment when, overcoming a final hesitation, he started forward from the door, fascinated and full of violent feelings, his mother's voice, in a tone that was far from strangled—that was, indeed, almost caressing—unarmored gently, "Let me go"; and in direct contradiction to this request, the arm which she had been holding up in her attempt to catch hold of the bed rail moved downward and encircled her husband's neck. Astonished, almost disappointed, Marcello retreated and went out again into the passage.

Very quietly, taking care to make no noise on the stairs, he went down to the ground floor and into the kitchen. Now again he was pricked by curiosity to know whether the cat that had jumped down from the dining-room window was the one he feared he had killed. When he pushed open the kitchen door, a quiet domestic scene was visible—the elderly cook and the young maid sitting together eating at the marble-topped table that stood between the electric stove and the refrigerator, in the white-painted room. And on the floor underneath the window was the cat, its pink tongue busy lapping milk from a bowl. But—as he at once saw, to his disappointment—it was not the gray cat, it was a tabby, and entirely different.

Not knowing how to justify his presence in the kitchen, he went over to the cat, stooped down and stroked its back. The cat, without interrupting its milk-lapping, began to purr. The cook, rising, went and closed the door. Then she opened the refrigerator, took out a plate with

"Ice of pudding on it, put it on the table, and draw up a chair, said to Marcello, "Would you like a piece of last night's pudding? I put it aside specially for you." Marcello, without a word, left the cat, sat down and started eating the pudding.

Well, there are some things I can't understand," said the maid. "They have so much time all day long, and plenty of room in the house, and yet they have to start quarreling at the table, with the boy there."

The cook replied, in a sententious tone of voice: "If I don't want to look after children, it's better not to bring them into the world."

Why," observed the maid after a short silence, "why, I'm old enough to be her father . . . Of course they can't live on together."

If *that* was all. . . ." said the cook, with a meaningful glance in the direction of Marcello.

Besides," continued the maid, "if you ask me, that isn't normal."

At this word Marcello pricked up his ears, though he went on slowly eating the pudding. "And *she* thinks I'm the same as me," pursued the maid. "D'you know what she said to me the other night when I was helping her with the undress? 'Giacomina, one of these days my husband'll leave me' . . . And I answered: 'But, ma'am, why don't you leave him then?' . . . and she. . . ."

"Sh. . . ." the cook interrupted her, with a nod at Marcello. The maid understood and asked Marcello, "Where are Daddy and Mummy?"

"Upstairs in the bedroom," answered Marcello. And then, as though urged by some irresistible impulse, "It's quite true that Daddy isn't normal. D'you know what he did?"

No, what?"

He killed a cat," said Marcello.

A cat? And how did he do that?"

With my slingshot . . . I saw him in the garden, following a gray cat that was walking along the wall. Then I took a stone and shot at the cat and hit it in the The cat fell into Roberto's garden and then I went out to have a look and I saw that it was dead." As he

spoke, he became increasingly vehement, but without ever losing the tone of voice of the innocent person who tells, with candid, unknowing ingenuousness, of some misdeed at which he has been present.

"Fancy that!" said the maid, clasping her hands together, "a cat . . . and a man of that age, a gentleman, taking his son's slingshot and killing a cat! You don't have to tell me he's abnormal."

"A man who's unkind to animals is unkind to humans too," said the cook. "You begin by killing a cat and you end by killing a man."

"Why?" asked Marcello suddenly, raising his eyes from his plate.

"That's what they say," answered the cook, stroking his hair. "But you know," she went on, turning to the maid, "it's not always true . . . That man who killed all those people at Pistoia . . . I read about it in the paper . . . d'you know what he does now, in prison? He keeps a canary."

The pudding was finished. Marcello rose and went out of the kitchen.

CHAPTER 2

DURING the summer at the seaside, Marcello's dread of what fate held in store for him—so simply expressed by the cook when she said, "You begin by killing a cat and you end by killing a man"—faded gradually from his mind. He still thought often of that inscrutable, pitiless mechanism in which his life seemed, for some days, to have become entangled, but he thought of it with a steadily diminishing fear, and more as an alarm signal than as the verdict without appeal that for some time had terrified him. The days passed happily, with their burning sunshine and their intoxicating saltiness, with their variety of amusements and discoveries; and Marcello, each day that passed, felt that he had won some kind of vic-

tory, not so much over himself—since he had never been conscious of guilt of a deliberate, direct kind—as over that obscure, malevolent, cunning, external force, darkly tinged with doom and misfortune, that had led him or almost against his will, from destruction of the flower to the slaughter of the lizards and thence to the attempt to kill Roberto. He felt this force to be ever-present and menacing though no longer crushing; but—as sometime happens in nightmares when, terrified by the presence of a monster, you think you can fool it by pretending to be asleep, whereas of course the whole thing is a dream and you really are asleep—so it seemed to him that, since he could not free himself once and for all from the threat of this force, the best plan was to lull it to sleep by feigning a carefree forgetfulness he was still far from having attained.

It was one of the most unrestrained, if not the happiest, of Marcello's summer holidays, and it was certainly the last of his life in which he was a child without any distaste for childishness or any desire to escape from it. His heedlessness was partly due to the natural inclination of his age, but partly due also to his wish to escape at all costs from the evil circle of foreboding and doom. Marcello was not aware of it, but the impulse that drove him to hurl himself into the sea ten times a morning, to compete in boisterousness with the most boisterous of his playfellows, to row for hours on the scorching sea, in fact to do all the things that are done at seaside places with a kind of exaggerated enthusiasm, was exactly the same impulse that had driven him to try and make Roberto his accomplice after the slaughter of the lizards and to seek to get himself punished by his parents after the death of the cat. It was a desire for normality, a wish to conform to a recognized, general rule; a longing to be like everyone else, inasmuch as to be different meant to be guilty. But the deliberate, artificial quality of his behavior was brought to light, every now and then, by a sudden, painful recollection of the dead cat lying among the white and purple irises in Roberto's garden.

This recollection frightened him, as a debtor is frightened by the memory of his own signature at the bottom

of a document acknowledging his debt. It seemed to him that, with that death, he had taken upon himself a vague but terrible obligation from which, sooner or later, he would not be able to extricate himself, even though he were to hide himself under the earth or cross the oceans so that all trace of him was lost. At such moments he consoled himself with the thought that a month, two months, three months had passed; that soon a year, two years, three years would have gone by; that, in fact, the most important things were, not to arouse the monster, and to make the time pass quickly. In any case these attacks of discouragement and fear were rare, and toward the end of summer they ceased altogether. When Marcello went back to Rome, all that he retained of the episode and of the other episodes that had preceded it was a hazy, almost imperceptible memory, as of something that he had perhaps experienced, but in another life with which he now had no connection whatsoever except a vague remembrance that was devoid both of responsibility and of consequences.

His forgetfulness was aided, once he had returned home, by the excitement of going to school. Marcello had hitherto had lessons at home, and this was his first year of school. The novelty of his schoolfellows, of the teachers, the classrooms, the schedules—a novelty in which an idea of order and discipline and shared occupations was always discernible, under a variety of aspects—was extremely pleasing to him after the disorder, the lack of rules, the loneliness of his own home. It was rather like the boarding school he had dreamed about that day at the table, but without constraint or servitude, with only its pleasant sides and without those unpleasant ones that made it like a prison.

Marcello very soon realized that he had a profound liking for school life. He enjoyed getting up punctually in the morning, washing and dressing in a hurry, wrapping up his textbooks and exercise-books tightly and neatly in the piece of oilcloth with elastic fastenings, and hurrying off through the streets to the school. He entered into the old school building with a crowd of schoolfellows, running up the dirty staircase

dreary, echoing corridors, and then suddenly slowing down when he came into the classroom among the rows of benches in front of the still unoccupied teacher's desk. He enjoyed above all the ritual of the lessons—the entrance of the teacher, the roll call, the questions, the rivalry with the other boys in giving answers and the victories and defeats in that rivalry, the quiet, impersonal tone of the teacher's voice, the very manner, so eloquent in itself, in which the classroom was arranged, with the rows of boys, all sharing the same need to learn, facing the teacher as he instructed them.

Marcello, however, was a mediocre scholar, and in certain subjects he was among the very last in the class. What he loved about school was not so much the lessons as the entirely new mode of life, which suited his tastes much better than the way he had lived hitherto. Again it was normality that attracted him; and all the more in that he discovered it to be not a casual matter nor one that was dependent upon the preferences and natural inclinations of the mind, but a thing pre-established, impartial, indifferent to individual tastes, both limited and upheld by authoritative rules that were all directed toward one single purpose.

But his candor and lack of experience made him awkward and insecure before those other rules, unspoken but existent nevertheless, the rules that concerned the relationships of the boys with each other, outside of school discipline. This too was an aspect of the new normality, but one that was more difficult to master. He was made aware of it the first time he was called up to the desk to show his written exercise. When the teacher had taken the exercise-book from him and, having put it in front of him on the desk, was preparing to read it, Marcello, accustomed to the affectionate and familiar relationships he had had with the governesses who had hitherto taught him at home, instead of standing aside on the platform as he waited for the teacher's criticism, placed his arm, in a perfectly natural way, round the latter's shoulders and brought his face close to his, in order to follow him as he read the exercise. The teacher, without showing any surprise, merely removed the hand Marcello had laid on.

his shoulder and freed himself from his arm; but the whole class burst into noisy laughter in which Marcello seemed to detect a disapproval that was different from that of the teacher and much less indulgent and understanding. Later, as soon as he had managed to overcome his embarrassment and shame, he realized that his innocent gesture had caused him to fall short of two different standards at the same time—the scholastic standard requiring him to be disciplined and respectful toward his teacher, and the boys' standard requiring him to be crafty and to hide his feelings. And—what was even more curious—these two standards did not contradict, but actually complemented each other in some mysterious way.

Yet, as he at once realized, if it was fairly easy to become a competent scholar in quite a short time, it was much more difficult to become a shrewd, self-possessed schoolboy. This latter transformation was made difficult by his lack of experience, his family habits and even his physical appearance. Marcello had inherited from his mother a perfection of feature almost extravagant in its regularity and charm. His face was round, with brown, delicate cheeks, a small nose, a curving mouth which wore a capricious, rather sullen expression, a pronounced chin and, beneath the fringe of chestnut hair almost entirely covering his brow, eyes which were somewhere between gray and blue, slightly somber, although their expression was innocent and caressing. It was almost the face of a girl; but raw boys would probably not have noticed this had it not been that the charm and beauty of the face were stressed by certain truly feminine characteristics in Marcello that made one wonder whether he might not be a girl dressed up as a boy—an unusual facility for blushing, an irresistible tendency to display his affectionate nature by caressing gestures, a desire to please that was carried even to servility and coquettishness. These qualities were innate in Marcello though he was unconscious of them. When he became aware that they made him ridiculous in the eyes of the other boys, it was already too late. Even if he had been able, if not to eliminate, at least to control them, his reputation as a little girl in trousers was already established.

They teased him almost automatically, as though his feminine character were by now an accepted thing. They would ask him, with pretended seriousness, why in the world he did not sit at the benches where the girls sat and what was the idea of putting on pants instead of a skirt; or how he spent his time at home, doing needle work or playing with dolls; or why hadn't he had his ears pierced for earrings. Sometimes, underneath the desk where he sat, he would find a piece of cloth and a needle and a ball of wool, put there to show him the kind of work he ought to be engaged in. Sometimes it was a box of face powder. One morning it was actually a pink brassière that one of the boys had stolen from his elder sister. And from the very beginning they had transformed his name into a feminine diminutive and called him Marcellina. These buffooneries provoked a feeling of anger mixed with a kind of flattered complacency in him, although one part of him were not at all dissatisfied; but he could not have told whether this complacency arose from the character of the buffooneries or from the fact that his companions took notice of him, even if it was only to laugh at him.

One morning when as usual they were whispering behind his back, "Marcellina . . . Marcellina . . . is it true you wear woman's drawers?" he stood up and, having raised his arm for permission to speak, complained in a loud voice, amid the sudden silence of the class, of being called by a woman's name. The teacher, a big bearded, coarse-looking man, listened to him with a smile that was half hidden by the hairs of his gray beard, and then said, "So they call you by a woman's name, do they . . . And what is it?"

"Marcellina," said Marcello.

"And you don't like it?"

"No, I don't . . . because I'm a man."

"Come up here," said the teacher. Marcello obeyed and went and stood beside the desk. "Now," went on the teacher in a pleasant voice, "show the class your muscles."

Marcello obediently bent his arm, expanding his muscles. The teacher leant forward in his chair, felt his arm, shook his head in ironical approval, and then, turning

to the class said, "As you can see, Clerici is a strong fellow . . . and he's prepared to show he's a man and not a woman . . . Who's going to challenge him?"

A long silence followed. The teacher looked all around the class and then concluded: "Not one . . . well, that's a sign that you're afraid of him. Then you must stop calling him Marcellina." The whole class burst out laughing. Marcello, red in the face, went back to his seat. But from that day on, instead of stopping, the teasing was redoubled, aggravated partly by the fact that Marcello had, as they told him, behaved like a sneak, breaking the unspoken law of solidarity that bound the boys together.

Marcello realized that in order to stop them from teasing him he must give his schoolfellows some proof that he was not as effeminate as he seemed; but he knew instinctively that such proof required something more than a mere showing off of his arm muscles in the way the teacher had made him do. Something more unusual was needed, something that would strike the boys' imaginations and arouse admiration. What?

He could not have said it in so many words, but in a general sense what was needed was some action or some object that would suggest the idea of force, of manliness, if not actually of brutality. He had noticed that they all had a great admiration for a boy called Avanzini because he was the possessor of a pair of big leather boxing gloves. Avanzini, a slight, fair boy, smaller than he and not as strong, did not even know how to use these boxing gloves; yet they had brought him a special sort of consideration. The same sort of admiration was also given to a boy named Pugliese because he knew—or rather claimed to know—a certain Japanese wrestling trick which, according to him, was infallible for putting your opponent on the floor. It was true that Pugliese had never been able to make the trick work, but this did not prevent the boys respecting him in the same way they respected Avanzini. Marcello was aware that as soon as possible he must show himself to be in possession of some object such as the boxing gloves, or must devise some form of prowess such as the Japanese wrestling. He was also aware that he was not so frivolous or amateurish as his companions

but belonged, whether he liked it or not, to the breed of those who take life and its obligations seriously; and that, in Avanzini's place, he would have broken the nose of his enemies, and in Pugliese's, would have twisted their necks. The knowledge that he was incapable of being merely rhetorical and superficial inspired in him a vague mistrust of himself; and while he longed to furnish his companions with the proof of strength they appeared to demand from him in exchange for their respect, he was at the same time vaguely frightened of it.

One day he noticed a few of the boys, who were usually among the most determined of his tormentors, confabulating together. He thought he understood from their glances that they were devising some new joke against him. Lesson time, however, passed without incident, though looks and whispers confirmed him in his suspicions. When the class was dismissed Marcello, without looking round, went off toward home. It was early in November, the air was stormy but mild, and in it the last warmth and smell of the now dead summer seemed to mingle with the first, still hesitant harshness of autumn. Marcello felt vaguely excited by this atmosphere of natural decay and devastation; he detected a restless desire for destruction and death very similar to the desire, months before, that had urged him on to decapitate the flowers and kill the lizards. Summer had been a season of stillness, of perfection, of abundance, with clear skies and trees covered with leaves and branches full of birds. It was with delight that he now saw the autumn wind demolishing and tearing to pieces that perfection, that abundance, that stillness, driving dark, ragged clouds across the sky, snatching the leaves from the trees and whirling them on the ground, chasing away the birds that one could see, between leaves and clouds, in black, orderly bands on their migratory flight.

At the turn in the street, he noticed a group of five of his schoolmates following him, and there could be no doubt they were following *him* because two of them lived in the opposite direction; but, engrossed in his autumnal enjoyments, he paid no special attention to them. He was in a hurry now to reach the big avenue.

planted with plane trees from which a side road led to his home. He knew that on the pavements of this avenue the dead leaves were piled up by thousands, yellow and rustling; and he had a foretaste of the pleasure he would derive from dragging his feet through the piles of leaves, scattering them and enjoying the sound they made. In the meantime, almost for fun, he tried to make his pursuers lose track of him, going now into a doorway and now mixing with the crowd. But every time, as he soon saw, the five boys after a moment's hesitation found him again. The avenue was quite close now; and Marcello was ashamed of being seen amusing himself with the dead leaves. So he decided to face them, and, turning suddenly, asked, "Why are you following me?" One of the five, a fair boy with a sharp face and a close-cropped head, answered promptly, "We're not following you. The street belongs to everybody, doesn't it?" Marcello said nothing and walked on.

Soon he came to the avenue with its two rows of enormous, bare plane trees and the line of many-windowed houses behind the trees, and here were the dead leaves, yellow as gold, scattered over the black asphalt and piled up in the gutters. He could not see the five boys now. Perhaps they had stopped following him and he was alone in the wide avenue with its deserted pavements. Without hurrying, he thrust his feet into the leaves that lay thick on the ground and started walking slowly, enjoying the sensation of plunging up to his knees in the light, shifting mass of rustling foliage. As he stooped to pick up a handful of leaves, intending to throw them up in the air, he heard again the mocking voices, "Marcellina . . . Marcellina . . . show us your drawers." Then there came over him, all at once, a longing to fight, an almost pleasant sensation that lit up his face with pugnacious excitement. He stood up and moved in a determined fashion toward his persecutors, saying, "Will you go away—or won't you?"

Instead of answering, all five of them threw themselves upon him. Marcello had intended to behave rather like the Horatii and the Curiatii in the history books—to take them one at a time, running here and there dealing

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Instead of answering, all five of them threw themselves upon him. Marcello had intended to behave rather like the Horatii and the Curiatii in the history books—to take them one at a time, running here and there dealing

violent blows at each of them until he compelled them to abandon their undertaking. But he realized at once that this plan was impossible; the five boys had had the resight to close in tightly upon him; and now one of them had hold of his arms, another his legs and two of them of his body. The fifth, he could see, had in the meantime hastily opened a parcel, and now approached him cautiously with a little girl's blue cotton petticoat angling from his hands. They were all laughing as they held him, and the one with the petticoat said, "Come on, farcellina . . . it's no use resisting . . . we're going to put this petticoat on you and then we'll let you go home to Mummy."

This was exactly the kind of joke that Marcello had foreseen—a joke that was, as usual, connected with his insufficiently masculine appearance. Furious, scarlet in the face, he started struggling as hard as he could; but the five of them were too strong for him and, although he succeeded in scratching the face of one of them and in planting a blow in the stomach of another, he felt his own movements were gradually weakening. Finally, as he was moaning, "Let me go . . . let me go," there was a cry of triumph from his tormentors; the petticoat was slipped over his head, and his protests were smothered inside a kind of bag. He went on struggling, but in vain. Killfully the boys pulled the petticoat down to his waist, and he felt them knotting it at the back. And then, just as they were shouting, "Pull it . . . come on . . . pull it tighter!" he heard a quiet voice asking, in a tone more of curiosity than of reproof, "May one ask what you're doing?"

Immediately the five boys let him go and ran off and he found himself alone again, all untidy and out of breath, with the petticoat tied round his waist. He raised his eyes and saw standing in front of him the man whose voice he had heard. Dressed in a dark-gray uniform with high, tight collar, pale, lean, with deep-set eyes, a large, melancholy nose, a scornful mouth and hair *en brosse*, he gave an impression at first glance of exaggerated austerity. But when you looked at him again—Marcello observed—you saw he had certain characteristics that had

nothing austere about them—quite the contrary, in fact, an anxious, eager look in his eye, a certain softness, most looseness, in his mouth, a general lack of self-confidence in his whole demeanor. He stooped down and picked up the books Marcello had dropped during the struggles, and as he handed them to him he said, "Were they trying to do to you?"

His voice too, like his face, was severe, but at the same time it was not without a certain strangled gentleness. Marcello, irritated, replied, "They're always playing tricks on me . . . they're a lot of fools." Meanwhile he was trying to undo the knot in the belt of the petticoat.

"Wait a minute," said the man, stooping down and untying it. The petticoat fell to the ground and Marcello stepped out of it, first trampling on it and then kicking it on to a heap of dead leaves. The man asked him, in a timid sort of way, "You were on your way home, were you?"

"Yes," said Marcello, raising his eyes and looking at him.

"Well," said the man, "I'll take you there in my car" and he pointed to a motorcar standing not far off from the pavement. Marcello looked; it was a car of a make he did not know, possibly a foreign one, long, black, and fashionably styled. It came into his head that this car, standing there a few paces away from them, implied premeditation in the man's apparently casual approach. He hesitated before answering; the man insisted, "Come along. Before I take you home I'll take you for a nice ride, shall I?"

Marcello wanted to refuse, or rather he felt he ought to refuse. But he did not have time; the man had already taken the bundle of books from him, saying, "I'll carry them," and was walking to the car. He followed, slightly surprised at his own docility but not at all displeased. The man opened the door, made Marcello get into the front and flung the books onto the back seat. Then he took his place at the wheel, closed the door, put on his gloves and started the engine.

The car moved in a leisurely, majestic fashion, with a subdued humming, down the long tree-lined avenue.

was indeed an old-fashioned car, Marcello thought, but it had been kept in perfect condition, with all its brasswork and nickel fittings lovingly polished and shining. And now the man, holding the wheel with one hand, picked up a peaked cap and put it on his head. The cap emphasized the severity of his appearance, adding an almost military air. Marcello, embarrassed, asked him, "Is it your car?"

"No," said the man without turning his head, at the same time moving his right hand to sound the horn, which had a solemn tone and was just as old-fashioned as the car itself. "No, it's not mine . . . it belongs to my employer . . . I'm the chauffeur."

Marcello said nothing. The man, still without turning his head and driving with detached, elegant precision, went on, "D'you mind my not being the owner? Does it make you ashamed?"

Marcello eagerly protested. "No, of course not . . . Why should it?"

The man gave a faint smile of satisfaction and accelerated. "We'll go up the hill a bit now . . . up on to Monte Mario, shall we?" he said.

"I've never been there," answered Marcello.

"It's fine up there," said the man; "you can see the whole town." He was silent for a moment and then added, very gently, "What's your name?"

"Marcello."

"Yes, of course," said the man, as though talking to himself. "They were calling you Marcellina, those friends of yours . . . My name's Pasquale."

Marcello had hardly time to think that Pasquale was a ridiculous name before the man, as though he had read his thought, added, "But it's a ridiculous name . . . You call me Lino."

The car was now passing through the wide and dirty streets of a working-class quarter, between blocks of dreary tenements. Groups of urchins playing in the middle of the street scampered out of the way, bareheaded women and ragged-looking men on the pavements stared at the unusual spectacle. Marcello lowered his eyes, embarrassed at all this curiosity. "This is il Triofale here," said the man, "but we're just coming to Monte Mario." The car

left the poor quarter, coming out, just behind a trolley, into a wide road that wound up the hill between two rows of houses. "What time d'you have to be home?"

"There's lots of time," said Marcello; "we never have lunch before two."

"Who is there at your home? Father and mother?"

"Yes."

"Have you any brothers and sisters?"

"No."

"And what does your father do?"

"He doesn't do anything," replied Marcello rather hesitatingly.

The car overtook the trolley at a turn, and the man, in order to take the curve as sharply as possible, merely pressed down his arms on the steering wheel, not moving his body, with a dexterity that was full of elegance. Then the car, still going uphill, passed alongside high, grass-grown walls, iron gates of villas and hedges of elder trees. Every now and then a doorway decorated with Venetian lanterns or an arch with a crimson-painted sign revealed the presence of some restaurant or rustic inn. Lino asked, "Do your father and mother give you presents?"

"Yes," answered Marcello vaguely. "Sometimes."

"Many or few?"

Marcello did not want to confess how few his presents were, or that sometimes even birthdays and similar occasions went past without any at all. So all he answered was, "Not too bad."

"D'you like getting presents?" asked Lino, opening the dashboard compartment and taking out a yellow cloth, with which he wiped the windshield.

Marcello looked at him. Lino was still looking straight ahead, his body erect, the peak of his cap well down over his eyes. "Yes, I do," said Marcello in a haphazard sort of way.

"What, for instance, would you like as a present?"

This time there could be no doubt about his meaning, and Marcello could not but think that the mysterious Lino, for some reason of his own, really intended to give him a present. He remembered in a flash the great attraction that weapons had for him, and at the same time, with

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he feeling of making a discovery, he said to himself the possession of a real weapon would ensure the consideration and respect of his schoolfellows. Rather skeptically, for he was conscious of asking too much, he hazarded "Well, a revolver, for instance. . . ."

"A revolver?" the man repeated, without showing surprise. "What sort of revolver? A revolver with cartridges or a compressed air revolver?"

"No," said Marcello boldly; "a real revolver."

"And what would you do with a real revolver?"

Marcello preferred not to give his real reason. "I practice shooting at a target," he replied, "until I feel I was a crack shot."

"But why d'you want so much to be a crack shot?"

Marcello thought the man was asking all these questions more to make him talk than from real curiosity. He answered seriously, "If you're a good shot you can defend yourself against anybody."

The man was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Put your hand in that pocket, there, in the door beside you."

Marcello, his interest aroused, did as he was told and felt, beneath his fingers, the coldness of some metal object. "Pull it out," said the man.

The car swerved suddenly to avoid a dog crossing the road. Marcello pulled out the metal object; it was a revolver, black, flat, laden with destruction and death, its barrel projecting forward as though to spit out the bullets. Almost unwittingly, his fingers trembling with satisfaction, he grasped the butt in his fist. "A revolver like that?" asked Lino.

"Yes," said Marcello.

"Well," said Lino, "if you really want it I'll give you one . . . Not that one; it belongs to the car, but another one just like it."

Marcello said nothing. He felt he was living in a fairy tale world, a world quite different from the usual one, in which unknown motorists invited him to go for a car ride and presented him with revolvers. Everything seemed to have become extraordinarily easy; but for some reason he could not understand he felt that this quality of easiness, appetizing as it was, might prove on further trial to have

an unpleasant taste, as though some hidden difficulty, still unknown but menacing and soon to be revealed, were bound up with it. Probably, he thought quite coolly, each of them sitting there in the car had his own purpose; his was to get possession of a revolver, Lino's to obtain, in exchange for the revolver, something still mysterious and probably disagreeable. It now remained to be seen which the two would get the best of the bargain. "Where are you going?" he asked.

Lino answered: "We're going to the house where I live . . . to fetch the revolver."

"And where is the house?"

"We're just about there," the man replied, taking the revolver from his hand and putting it in his pocket.

Marcello looked. The car had stopped in a road that looked like an ordinary country road, with trees and elderbush hedges, and, beyond the hedges, fields and the sky. But a little farther on was an arched gateway with two pillars and a wrought-iron gate painted green. "Wait here," said Lino. He got out and went to the gateway. Marcello watched him as he threw open the two leaves of the gate and then turned back again. He was not tall, although when he was sitting down he looked it; his legs were short in proportion to his body, and he was broad in the hips. Lino got into the car again and drove it through the gateway. A graveled drive came into sight between two rows of small, scraggy cypresses which were being battered and bent by the stormy wind. At the far end of the drive, in a thin ray of sunshine, something glittered incongruously against the background of thundery sky. It was the glass of a veranda projecting from the side of a two-story building. "There's the villa," said Lino, "but there's nobody there."

"Who does it belong to?" asked Marcello.

"It belongs to a lady," said Lino, "an American lady . . . but she's away, at Florence."

The car stopped in front of the house. It was a long, low building, in which expanses of white cement and red brick alternated with the reflecting stripes of window glass, and it had a colonnade of square pillars of un-

dressed stone. Lino opened the door of the car and jumped out, saying, "Come on, let's get out."

Marcello did not know what Lino wanted of him, nor could he succeed in guessing. But the feeling of mistrust was increasing steadily within him, the mistrust of someone who is afraid of being taken in. "How about the revolver?" he asked, without moving.

"It's in there," said Lino rather impatiently, indicating the windows of the villa; "we'll go and fetch it now."

"You're going to give it to me?"

"Yes, of course—a fine new revolver."

Without another word, Marcello got out of the car was at once struck by a gust of warm, dust-laden air from the intoxicating, mournful autumnal wind. He did not know why, but that gust of wind brought with it a sense of presentiment, and as he followed Lino he turned to give a last look at the graveled space in front of the house bordered with shrubs and stunted oleanders. Lino walked ahead of him, and he noticed that there was a bulge in the side pocket of his tunic: it was the revolver which he had taken out of his hand as they arrived. Suddenly he became certain that Lino had no other revolver in his possession and he wondered why on earth he had lied to him and why he was now dragging him into the house. The feeling that he was being deceived grew stronger, and with the determination to keep his eyes open and not to let himself be deceived. In the meantime they had come into

a large sort of lounge hall in which were groups of armchairs and sofas, with a hooded fireplace of red brick on the far wall. Lino, still walking in front of Marcello, went across the room toward a blue-painted door in one corner. Marcello asked anxiously, "Where are we going?"

"We're going to my room," Lino answered lightly without turning around.

Marcello made up his mind that, as a precaution, he would put up some preliminary resistance, so that Lino would understand that he had seen through his little game. He stayed some distance away when Lino opened the blue door, and said, "Give me the revolver at once and let it go away."

"But I haven't got the revolver here," replied Lino, turning half around. "It's in my room."

"Yes, you have got it," said Marcello. "It's in your pocket."

"No, that's the one that belongs to the car."

"You haven't got any other one."

A slightly impatient movement on Lino's part was quickly suppressed. Marcello noticed again how the softness of his mouth and the anxious, suffering, imploring look in his eyes contrasted with the rest of his thin, severe face. "I'll give you this one," he said finally; "but come with me . . . what's the matter? . . . we might be seen here by one of the country people—with all these windows. . . ."

"And what's the harm if they do see us?" was the question Marcello would have liked to ask; but he refrained, because he was aware, in some obscure way, that there *was* harm in it, though he could not have defined it. "All right," he said in a childish sort of way; "but you'll give it to me afterward, won't you?"

"Don't worry."

They went into a small, white passage and Lino closed the door. At the other end of the passage there was another blue door. This time Lino did not walk in front of Marcello, but moved to his side and put his arm lightly round his waist. "Are you really so very keen on having your revolver?" he asked.

"Yes," said Marcello, almost incapable of speaking, so embarrassed was he by the man's arm.

Lino removed his arm, opened the door and ushered Marcello into his room. It was a small, white room, long and narrow, with a window at the far end. There was nothing in it but a bed, a table, a cupboard and a couple of chairs. All these pieces of furniture were painted a light green. Marcello noticed an ordinary bronze crucifix hanging on the wall over the head of the bed. On the bedside table lay a thick book, bound in black with red edges, that Marcello judged was a book of devotions. The room, empty of small objects and of clothes, looked extraordinarily clean, but there was a strong smell in the air, like the smell of Eau de Cologne soap. Where had he smelt it.

before? In the bathroom at home, perhaps, just after his mother had been there in the morning. Lino said to him, in a careless sort of way, "Sit down on the bed, won't you? . . . it's more comfortable"; and he obeyed in silence. Lino was moving around the room now. He took off his cap and put it on the window sill; he unbuttoned his collar and wiped away the sweat from around his neck with a handkerchief. Then he opened the cupboard, took out a big bottle of Eau de Cologne, wet the handkerchief and moved it with relief over his face and his forehead. "Won't you have some too?" he asked Marcello, "it's refreshing."

Marcello would have liked to refuse, for both the bottle and the handkerchief filled him with a kind of disgust. But he allowed Lino to pass the palm of his hand, in a cool caress, over his face. Lino put the Eau de Cologne back in the cupboard and came and sat down on the bed, facing Marcello.

They looked at each other. Lino's thin, austere face had now taken on a new expression, yearning, caressing, imploring. He gazed at Marcello and was silent. Marcello, losing patience—and also to put a stop to this embarrassing contemplation—at last asked, "How about the revolver?"

Lino sighed and pulled the weapon, as though unwillingly, out of his pocket. Marcello put out his hand, but Lino's expression hardened and he withdrew the revolver again, saying hurriedly, "I'll give it to you . . . but you must deserve it first."

Marcello felt almost a relief at these words. So it was as he had thought; Lino wanted something in exchange for the revolver. In an eager, falsely ingenuous tone of voice, as when at school he was swapping pens or marbles, he said, "You say what you want in exchange and then we'll come to an agreement."

get it. Although he did not understand what it could be, he said, still in that same falsely ingenuous tone, "I don't know; you must tell me."

There was a moment's silence. "Would you do *anything*?" Lino asked all at once, in a louder voice, grasping Marcello's hand.

Both the tone of voice and the gesture alarmed Marcello. He wondered whether by any chance Lino was a thief and was trying to make him into an accomplice. However, after a moment's consideration, he decided that he could reject this possibility. Cautiously, he answered, "What is it you want me to do? Why don't you tell me?"

Lino was playing with his hand now, looking at it, turning it about, squeezing it and then relaxing his pressure. Then, almost roughly, he thrust it away from him and said slowly, looking at him, "I'm sure there are some things you wouldn't do."

"Well, tell me what you mean," Marcello insisted, a sort of good will mingling with his embarrassment.

"No, no," Lino protested.

Marcello noticed that his pale face was tinged with a curious, uneven redness on the cheekbones. It seemed to him that Lino was tempted to speak, but wanted to be sure that he himself wished him to. He then made a gesture of quite conscious, though innocent, coquettishness. He leaned forward, put out his hand and took the man's hand in his, saying, "Come on, tell me; why won't you tell me?"

A long silence followed. Lino looked now at Marcello's hand, now at his smiling face, and appeared to be hesitating. At last he thrust the boy's hand away from him again, but gently this time; then rose and took a few steps about the room. Then he sat down and again took Marcello's hand in an affectionate manner, rather like a father or mother taking the hand of a son. Marcello," he said, "do you know who I am?"

"No."

"I'm an unfrocked priest," Lino burst out in an afflicted, heart-stricken, piteous voice, "an unfrocked priest, driven out in disgrace from the college where I was teaching . . . And you, in your innocence, don't understand

what I could be asking you for in exchange for this revolver that you covet so much . . . And I was tempted to take advantage of your ignorance, your innocence, your childish greed! . . . That's who I am, Marcello." He spoke in a tone of deep sincerity; then turned toward the head of the bed and unexpectedly addressed the crucifix without raising his voice, as if in lamentation: "I have prayed to You so much . . . but You have forsaken me . . . And always, always I fall again . . . Why have You forsaken me?" These words were lost in a sort of murmur, as though Lino were speaking to himself. Then he rose from the bed, went over and took up his cap from the window sill, and said to Marcello, "Come along . . . let's go . . . I'll take you home."

Marcello said nothing. He felt stunned and incapable for the moment of assessing what had happened. He followed Lino along the passage and across the hall. Outside, in front of the house, the wind was still blowing around the big black motorcar, beneath a cloudy, sunless sky. Lino got into the car and he sat beside him. The car moved down the drive and went gently out through the archway into the road. For a long time they did not speak. Lino drove as before, his body erect, the peak of his cap down over his eyes, his gloved hands resting on the wheel. They had covered a long stretch of road before Lino, without turning his head, asked, "Are you sorry you didn't get the revolver?"

These words rekindled in Marcello's mind the eager hope that he might yet possess the coveted object. After all, he persuaded himself, there might still be a chance that all was not lost. He answered with sincerity, "Yes, of course I'm sorry."

"Well then," said Lino, "if I promised to meet you tomorrow at the same time—would you come?"

"Tomorrow's Sunday," said Marcello judiciously, "but Monday would be all right . . . We could meet in the avenue, at the same place."

The other was silent for a moment. Then, suddenly, in a loud and mournful voice, he cried, "Don't speak to me any more . . . don't look at me . . . and if on Monday

you see me in the avenue at midday, don't take any notice of me, don't greet me—d'you understand?"

Whatever's wrong with him, Marcello wondered rather angrily. "I don't particularly want to see you," he answered, "it was you who made me go home with you today."

"Yes, but it mustn't happen again . . . never again," said Lino forcibly. "I know myself, and I know for certain that I shall be thinking of you all night . . . and that on Monday I shall be waiting for you in the avenue even if today I make up my mind not to . . . I know myself . . . but you're not to take any notice of me."

Marcello said nothing. Lino went on in the same violent manner: "I shall be thinking about you all night, Marcello . . . and on Monday I shall be at the avenue . . . with the revolver . . . but you're not to take any notice of me." He kept on turning the same phrase round and round and repeating it; and Marcello, with cool, innocent perspicacity, saw that Lino really did want to make an appointment with him and, with the excuse of putting him on his guard, was in fact doing so. Lino, after a moment's silence, asked him again, "Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes."

"What did I say?"

"That you'd be waiting for me at the avenue on Monday."

"That wasn't all I said," replied the other sadly.

"And that," Marcello concluded, "I'm not to take any notice of you."

"That's right," Lino confirmed, "not on any account . . . very likely I shall call out to you, beseech you, follow you in the car . . . promise you everything you want . . . but you're to go straight on and pay no attention to me."

Marcello, losing patience, answered, "All right, all right, I understand."

"But you're only a child," said Lino, passing from violence to a kind of caressing gentleness "and you won't be able to resist me . . . of course you're just a child, Marcello."

Marcello was offended. "I'm not a child. I'm a boy . . . and anyhow you don't know me."

Lino suddenly stopped the car. They were still on the hill, underneath a high garden wall, and a little further on was the archway, adorned with Venetian lanterns, of a restaurant. Lino turned toward Marcello. "Truly," he said to him with a kind of painful anxiety, "truly you *will* refuse to come with me?"

"But isn't it you yourself," said Marcello, conscious, now, of what he was aiming at, "isn't it you yourself who are asking me to come?"

"Yes, it's true," said Lino despairingly, starting the car again. "Yes, it's true . . . you're right . . . madman that I am, that's just what I'm doing . . . of course I am."

After this exclamation he said no more, and there was silence. The car went down the hill and passed again through the dirty streets of the working-class quarter. Then they reached the big avenue with the tall, pale, leafless plane trees, the heaped-up yellow leaves along the deserted pavements, the high buildings with their rows upon rows of windows. Soon they were in the quarter in which Marcello's home lay. Lino, without turning his head, asked: "Where's the house?"

"You'd better stop here," said Marcello, well aware of the pleasure that this sign of complicity was giving; "otherwise they might see me getting out of the car."

The car stopped. Marcello got out and Lino handed him his packet of books through the window, saying in a decided tone: "Till Monday then, in the avenue, at the same place."

"But I," said Marcello, taking the books, "I'm to pretend not to see you—isn't that so?"

Seeing Lino hesitate, he felt a kind of cruel satisfaction. Lino's eyes, burning intensely in their deep sockets, were brooding over him now with a look of entreaty and anguish. Then he burst out passionately, "Do as you like

but which seemed to him to indicate a despairing assent. Then the car drove off, moving slowly away in the direction of the avenue.

CHAPTER 3

EVERY morning Marcello was called at a fixed time by the cook, who had a particular affection for him. She would come into the room in the dark, carrying the breakfast tray, and put it down on the marble top of the chest of drawers. Then Marcello would see her taking the cord of the shutter with both hands and pulling it up with two or three jerks of her robust body. She would put the tray on his knees and stand watching him while he ate his breakfast, ready, the moment he had finished, to throw off his bed covers and urge him to get dressed. She herself helped him, handing him his clothes, sometimes kneeling down and tying his shoes. She was a lively, cheerful woman, full of good sense; and she had retained the accent and the affectionate ways of the province where she had been born.

Marcello woke up on Monday with a confused recollection of having heard an uproar of angry voices the evening before, while he was going to sleep—voices coming either from the ground floor or from his parents' bedroom. He waited till he had finished his breakfast and then casually asked the cook, who as usual was standing beside the bed, "What was going on last night?"

The woman looked at him with feigned, exaggerated surprise. "Nothing, as far as I know," she said.

Marcello saw that she had something to tell him: the false surprise, the knowing glint in her eye, her whole attitude showed it plainly. "I heard shouts . . ." he said.

"Ah, the shouting," said the woman; "but that's quite normal . . . Don't you know that your Daddy and Mummy often shout at each other?"

"Yes," said Marcello, "but they were shouting louder than usual."

She smiled and, leaning with both hands on the head of the bed, said, "Anyhow, they must have understood each other better by shouting, don't you think?"

This was one of her little tricks—asking questions that expected no answer, questions that were really statements. Marcello asked, "But what were they shouting about?"

The woman smiled again. "Why do people shout?" she said. "Because they don't agree."

"And why don't they agree?"

"What, those two?" she cried, enjoying the boy's questions. "Oh, for hundreds of reasons . . . why, perhaps because one day your Mummy wants to sleep with the window open and your Daddy doesn't . . . another day, because *he* wants to go to bed early and *she* wants to sit up late . . . there are always plenty of reasons, aren't there?"

All of a sudden, as though expressing a long-standing feeling, Marcello said, with gravity and conviction, "I don't want to stay here any longer."

"What d'you want to do then?" cried the woman, getting more and more jovial. "Why, you're a young boy, you can't go leaving your home . . . You must wait till you're grownup."

"I'd much rather," said Marcello, "they'd send me to a boarding school."

The woman looked at him with tender affection and said, "You're right . . . anyhow at a boarding school there'd be someone to look after you . . . D'you know why they were shouting so, last night?"

"No, why was it?"

"Wait a minute, I'll show you." She moved eagerly to the door and disappeared. Marcello heard her rushing downstairs and wondered again what could have been happening the night before. A moment later he heard the cook coming upstairs again, then she came into the room with an air of cheerful mystery. She was holding in her hand something that Marcello immediately recognized—

a large photograph in a silver frame that usually stood on the piano in the drawing room. It was an old photograph, taken when Marcello was little more than two years old. It showed Marcello's mother, dressed in white with her little boy, also in a little white dress, in her arms. There was a white ribbon in his long hair. "You see this photograph?" cried the cook gaily. "Your Mummy, yesterday evening, when she came back from the theatre, went into the drawing room, and the first thing she saw, on the piano, was this photograph . . . Poor thing, she almost fainted . . . Now just have a look and see what your Dad's done to this photograph."

Marcello, surprised, looked at the photograph. Someone, using the point of a penknife or a bodkin, had pierced the eyes both of the mother and of the little boy, and then, with a red pencil, had made a number of little marks underneath the eyes of both of them, as though to indicate tears of blood gushing from the four holes. The thing was so strange and unexpected and at the same time so mysteriously gruesome that for a moment Marcello did not know what to think. "It was your Dad who did that," cried the cook, "and your Mummy did quite right to shout at him."

"But why did he do it?"

"It's witchcraft. D'you know what witchcraft is?"

"No."

"When you wish evil to somebody, you do what your Daddy's done . . . Sometimes instead of making a hole through the eyes you do it through the chest . . . through the heart . . . and soon something happens."

"What happens?"

"The person dies . . . or some misfortune happens to him . . . it depends. . . ."

"But," stammered Marcello, "I haven't done Daddy any harm."

"And your Mummy, what harm's *she* done him?" cried the cook indignantly. "But you know what's wrong with your Dad? He's crazy . . . And you know where he'll end up? At Sant' Onofrio, in the asylum . . . And now come along and get dressed; it's time you start

I'll go and put back this photograph." She ran off gaily, and Marcello was left alone.

Thinking hard, but unable to find any explanation for the incident of the photograph, he went on dressing. He had never had any special feeling for his father, and the latter's hostility, whether real or not, did not pain him; but the cook's words about the harmful powers of witchcraft gave him food for thought. Not that he was superstitious or really believed that you could do harm to *someone simply by piercing the eyes of that person's photograph*, but this crazy act on his father's part reawakened in him an apprehension he had deceived himself into thinking he had allayed once and for all. It was the frightening, helpless feeling of being caught in a circle of grim fatality that had obsessed him all summer, evoked by some malign sympathy, sprang up a mind, more powerful than ever, before this with its stain of blood-red tears.

What was misfortune, he said to himself, but a faraway speck of black in the blue or serenest sky, a speck that suddenly grows larger a huge, pitiless bird and dives upon its unfortun like a vulture upon a carcass? Or a trap of which been forewarned, which you can clearly see which, nevertheless, you cannot help putting Or just a curse of clumsiness, of imprudence, or that creeps into your movements, your senses, y This last definition seemed to him the most fit one that reduced misfortune to a want of grace of grace to an intimate, obscure, inborn, insc tality—a fatality to which his attention had l recalled by his father's act, that stood like a sig the opening of a sinister road. He knew this f plied that he would kill somebody; but what him most was not so much murder as the know he was predestined to murder, no matter wh He was terrified, in effect, by the idea that the very consciousness of such a fatality was simply one more force that impelled him to submit to it—as though instead of consciousness there had been ignorance, but ignorance of

a special kind that no one could have considered ignorance, least of all himself.

But later, at school, his childish fickleness caused him suddenly to forget these presentiments. He had one of his tormentors for a desk-neighbor, a boy called Turchi, the oldest and at the same time the most ignorant boy in the class. He was the only one who, because he had had some boxing lessons, knew how to use his fists according to the rules: with his hard, angular face and close-cropped hair, his snub nose and thin lips, and the heavy, athletic-looking scarf wound round his neck, he already gave the impression of a professional pugilist. Turchi understood nothing of Latin; but when in the midst of a group of boys in the street outside the school, he put up a bony hand to take a minute cigarette-stump from his mouth and, furrowing the many wrinkles in his low forehead with a look of self-sufficient authority, declared, "*I think Colucci's going to win the championship,*" all the boys were struck dumb, filled with respect for him. Turchi, if required, could demonstrate, by taking hold of his nose between two fingers and pulling it to one side, that his nasal septum was broken just like a real boxer's; and it was not only boxing that he engaged in, but football and any other popular, violent form of sport. Toward Marcello, Turchi maintained a sarcastic attitude, almost solemn in its brutality. It had been he who, two days before, had held Marcello's arms while the other four slipped the petticoat over his head; and Marcello, remembering this, believed that this morning he had at last found a means of winning the other boy's scornful, arrogant respect.

Taking advantage of a moment when the geography teacher had turned his back to point with his long stick at the map of Europe, Marcello wrote hastily on a copybook, "*Today I'm getting a real revolver,*" and then pushed the copybook towards Turchi. Turchi, in spite of his ignorance, was, in his conduct, a model pupil. Always attentive, quiet, almost somber in his heavy, expressionless gravity, his inability to answer whenever he was asked even the simplest question astonished Marcello profoundly, and the latter often wondered what on earth he thought about during lessons, and why, if he was not

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doing his work, he pretended to be so industrious. So now, when Turchi saw the copybook, he made an impatient gesture, as much as to say, "Leave me alone—can't you see I'm listening?" But Marcello persisted, giving him a shove with his elbow, and then Turchi, without moving his head, lowered his eyes and read the writing. Marcello saw him take a pencil and write, "I don't believe it." Stung to the quick, Marcello hastened to confirm his former message by writing, "Word of honor." Turchi, mistrustful, retorted, "What make is it?" This question disconcerted Marcello; but after a moment's hesitation, he answered, "A Wilson." He was confusing the name with Weston, a name which he had in fact heard from Turchi himself, some time before. Turchi immediately wrote, "Never heard of it." Marcello concluded with, "I'll bring it to school tomorrow," and then the dialogue came suddenly to an end, for the teacher turned round and called on Turchi to tell him which was the biggest river in Germany. As usual Turchi rose to his feet and, after long consideration, confessed, without embarrassment and with a kind of sporting sincerity, that he did not know. At that moment the door opened and the janitor put his head in to announce the end of lesson time.

At all costs, Marcello thought as he hurried through the streets toward the avenue with the plane trees, at all costs he must make Lino keep his promise and give him the revolver. Marcello was aware that Lino would give him the weapon only if he wanted to, and as he walked he wondered what was the best line for him to take in order to be certain of attaining his object. Although he had not divined the real reason of Lino's odd behavior, he guessed, with an instinctive, almost feminine coquetry, that the quickest way for him to get possession of the revolver was the one suggested on Saturday by Lino himself—to take no notice of Lino, to scorn his offers, to deny his requests, in short, to make himself as valuable as possible; and finally to refuse to get into the car unless he was quite sure that the revolver was his. Why Lino set so much store by him, and why he himself should be in a position to carry on this kind of blackmail, Marcello could not have explained. The same instinct that suggested to him that he

could blackmail Lino gave him a hint of the presence, in the background of his relations with the chauffeur, of an unusual type of affection, of a quality as embarrassing as it was mysterious. But the revolver was the central point of all his thoughts. Besides, he could not have asserted honestly that this affection and the almost feminine role he had to perform were really disagreeable to him. The only thing he wanted to avoid, he thought as he came out, hot from running, into the avenue with the plane trees, was Lino's putting his arm around his waist, as he had done in the corridor at the villa the first time they had met.

As on Saturday, the weather was stormy and cloudy, with a mild wind that seemed richly laden with spoils snatched up all along its turbulent course—dead leaves, pieces of paper, feathers, bits of fluff, straws and dust. In the avenue, the wind attacked a pile of dry leaves, lifting numbers of them high up among the bare branches of the plane trees. His attention was distracted by watching them fluttering in the air against the gloomy background of the sky, like myriads of yellow hands with fingers opened wide; and then, lowering his eyes, he saw, through all these hands of gold whirling in the wind, the long, black, shining shape of the car standing beside the pavement. His heart started beating faster, he did not know why. Faithful to his plan, he did not hasten his step but walked on steadily toward the vehicle. He passed the window in a leisurely fashion and at once, as if at a signal, the door opened and Lino, without his cap, poked his head out and said, "Marcello, won't you get in?"

He could not help being surprised at this perfectly serious invitation, after the solemn oaths of their first meeting. So Lino knew himself well, Marcello reflected, and it was positively comic to see him do a thing that he himself had foreseen he would do in spite of every desire to the contrary. He walked on as though he had not heard, and noticed, with an obscure satisfaction, that the car had moved and was following him. The pavement was very wide and it was deserted as far as the eye could reach, between the line of regular, many-windowed buildings and the big, slanting trunks of the plane trees.

The car followed him at a walking pace, with a subdued humming sound caressing to the ear. After about twenty yards it passed him and stopped a short distance ahead; then the door opened again. He walked on without turning and again heard that melting voice imploring him. "Marcello, jump in . . . please do . . . forget what I said yesterday . . . Marcello, d'you hear me?" Marcello could not help saying to himself that the voice was rather repugnant—why should he moan in that way? It was lucky there was no one going along the street or he would have been ashamed. Nevertheless, he did not want to discourage the man altogether, and as he went on past the car he half turned and looked back, as though inviting him to persevere. He found himself throwing him a glance almost of encouragement, and was suddenly and unmistakably aware of the same feeling of not unpleasant humiliation of playing a part not entirely unnatural to him, that he had felt for a moment when the boys had fastened the petticoat round his waist. It was as though fundamentally he did not dislike acting the part of the coy, disdainful woman—was, in fact, led on by nature to do so.

Meanwhile the car had started again behind him. Marcello wondered whether the moment had come to yield, and decided, on reflection, that it had not yet arrived. The car passed close to him, not stopping but merely slowing down. He heard the man's voice calling to him, "Marcello . . ." and immediately afterward, the sudden hum of the engine as the car moved forward. He was afraid that Lino had lost patience and was going away; he was assailed by a great fear of having to show himself at school next day empty-handed; and he started running, crying out, "Lino . . . Lino . . . stop, Lino." But the wind carried his words away, scattering them in the air with the dead leaves in a cheerless, noisy squall; the car was growing smaller and smaller in the distance—evidently Lino had not heard and was going away—and he would not get the revolver, and Turchi would start tormenting him again. Then he sighed with relief and walked on at a more or less normal pace. The car had gone on ahead not to avoid him but to wait for him at a crossing; and it

ance into the spring night I felt as if I had been brushed across the eyes by some terrible essence of beauty, something of whose existence I had never before been aware. I desired to run after that strange, lovely girl but she was gone forever.

Mike Bailey tugged at my arm and said, "Well, let's get down to the restaurant."

"What restaurant?" I asked.

"Makino's," he said, and he led me through a jungle of thin and winding streets and I felt that I had never before really seen a Japanese town: the crowded life, the tiny shops, the paper doors with small lights shining through, the people in all kinds of costumes from spectacular kimonos to drab business suits, the varying faces, the multitudes of children, and the police boxes on the corner. At times I felt like a whale swimming upstream against a flood of minnows for I towered over the people and no matter how far or how fast we walked the same number of Japanese seemed to press in upon us.

We came at last to an extremely narrow alley and lucked into a restaurant doorway hung with red and white streamers that brushed our faces as we passed. Inside were many Japanese crowded at small tables eating ish, which I have never liked. A Japanese woman greeted us with three low bows, a little maid fell to her knees and took our shoes and two powdered make-believe geishas showed us up a flight of narrow stairs.

We entered onto a top floor where three couples sat quietly at small tables. I keep using the words *little* and *tiny* because it's a pretty powerful experience for a fellow six-foot-two to travel in Japan. For one thing, you're always ducking your head to keep from bashing your brains in on door jambs and everything you see seems to have been constructed for midgets.

In a corner, imprisoned by a quarter-circle of a rounded table stood a fire bucket.

Makino-san. The après-guerre geishas told us that we were to sit on the floor at the quarter-circle table that cut Makino off from the rest of the room.

Mike said, "This is the best tempura restaurant in Japan."

"What's tempura?" I asked.

"Look." He pointed to a menu painted on the wall in Japanese and English. Makino-san had twenty-nine varieties of fish from lobster to eel, including squid, octopus, shrimp, sardines and the excellent Japanese fish, tai. He also served about the same number of vegetables, especially ginko nuts, Japanese beans and shallots.

"This is living, son," Bailey cried, putting his arm about one of the make-believe geishas, who laughed and called him "Mike-san." The other geisha started to arrange my dishes for the meal but Mike said, "All right, girls, beat it." They nodded obediently and went downstairs. I must have looked disappointed, for he said, "It's silly to keep geishas at your table when you have a girl joining you."

"I didn't know a girl was eating with us."

"Didn't you see Fumiko-san say she'd be here?"

"The girl on the bridge?"

"Yeah. Fumiko-san. She gave me the high sign as she passed on the Bitchi-bashi."

"What's this Bitchi-bashi?"

"*Bashi's* Japanese for bridge. We call the one where the girls pass the Bitchi-bashi because there is so much lovely stuff there and you can't touch the merchandise."

"Look, Mike," I said. "I don't get this special approach. You know the girl. Why don't you just go up and ask her for a date?"

Bailey's jaw fell and he said, "A Takarazuka girl isn't allowed to have dates."

"Why not?"

"Well, in the old days theaters had a lousy reputation in Japan, so the railroad decided to keep Takarazuka what you might call impeccable."

"What railroad?" I asked.

"This whole resort grew up as a place for excursion

trains from Osaka and Kyoto and Kobe. Started with a hot springs, then a zoo and finally some genius thought up these girl shows."

"You mean a railroad still runs this?"

"Sure. They don't make a nickel on the town or the theater, but they do a fabulous business on the railroad. Everybody comes out to see the show. Fifty lavish scenes, a hundred beautiful girls—gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous."

"And none of those girls has dates?"

"Immediate dismissal. The railroad combs Japan for these kids, spends a lot of dough training them. They've got to behave."

I considered this for a moment and asked, "But if the girls can't have dates, how come you're dating one of them?"

"Like I told President Truman, 'Harry, you was wrong when you sold the Marines short.'" He started to jab me with his long finger when he stopped suddenly, scrambled on his feet and hurried to the door. "Fumikol" he cried with real emotion.

The delicate actress seemed entirely changed from when we had seen her shortly before on the Bitchi-bashi. Now she wore a kimono and hurried toward Mike in little running pin-toed steps that made her exquisitely charming. Her kimono was a powdery blue and at her neck at least five undergarments showed, each folded meticulously upon the next so as to form a handsome frame for her golden face. Her hair was not fixed in the antique Japanese manner but hung nearly to her shoulder, thus forming the rest of the frame for her slender and expressive face. She wore white tabi socks, white cork zori instead of shoes and an enormous sash tied in a flowing t in back. When I rose and extended my hand she lightly touched it with her own, which seemed impossibly delicate, and I was amazed at how graceful she seemed, so young.

Mike Bailey had passed the point of amazement. He was drooling and arranged her cushions and plates as if they were a French breakfast.

colored cheek and said, "It's murder trying to see you, baby." She laughed at this and her voice was high and tinkling like that of a child playing with dolls.

When she sat with us the tiny restaurant seemed to thrust back its walls, our talk grew more expansive and Makino, tucked away in his corner, started to fry the fish. Mike said generously. "This American is Ace Gruver, Seven MIGs." He showed her how jets fight and when she started to admire me perhaps a little too much he tried to change the subject, but she said, "I meet Gruver-san already."

Mike did a double take and Fumiko-san laughed again. "How you like me in *Swing Butterfly*?" she asked him.

"You were wonderful" he cried. "But I'll bet if you'd put that show on while MacArthur was here he'd have thrown you all in jail."

I asked why and Fumiko said—I can't explain how she talked or exactly what she did with English and Japanese gestures, but she made me understand—"Swing Butterfly make fun of American sailors who falling in love with Japanese girls. But Butterfly not commit hara-kiri." Here she grabbed a butter knife and performed the ritual. "If you like laugh, if you not too proud, you enjoy *Swing Butterfly*, I think."

"Did you like it?" I asked Mike.

"Anything this babe's in, I like," he drooled.

"What's she play?"

"I geisha," Fumiko explained. "I fight off whole ship-load American sailors."

With a deft twist of her shoulders she demonstrated how she played the role and Makino and two men in the restaurant roared and suddenly I didn't like being in that little upstairs room. I didn't appreciate having a fat cool laugh at Americans. I didn't like being hidden away in a corner with a Japanese girl, no matter how pretty, who ridiculed our men. In fact, I didn't like anything I'd seen happening in Japan since General MacArthur left and I didn't want to be a part of it. I found to my surprise that I was pretty much on the side of Mrs. Webster. After all

Mike and I sat glumly staring at our me galled me to be sitting on the floor, Japa the Takarazuka girls, by whom we had sat at a table, American style. I said, "here," but before we could leave, the lea the one in slacks—came over, looked n eye and spoke softly.

Makino translated, "She have no Ex sorry but Fumiko-san young girl from f Japan. Suppose she get fired Takarazuka face."

The lovely actress looked at me besee in Makino's interpretation, "Very difficu zuka girl. We got to protect one anothe

She smiled at me, bowed graciously and table. I felt lots better but now Mike beg in hell am I?" he demanded. "A man o pushed Makino's restraining hand away the table, reached down, grabbed Fumiko and kissed her until she had to struggle l he bowed politely to the girl in slacks mighty sorry, too. But us boys also have another."

Then we left, but at the door we looked four Takarazuka girls sitting primly on th at their plates.

When we got back to the barracks Mi blame the girls. They're under strict ru caught with an American soldier they're snippy babe in slacks sort of got my goat."

I asked, "Why do you bother with th date them?"

He put down his towel and looked at m "Since when does a man have to have rea a pretty girl?"

"But you can't even talk with her!"

"Son!" Mike cried. "Didn't you read young? Didn't you stumble upon them t

Where the prince fights his way through the wall of fire the more rules they put up against you the more fun it is.

"But she's a Japanese girl."

"Drop the adjective, son. She's a girl."

"When you kissed her . . . It looked as if you could really go for her."

"Son, when I come to any country I want to do three things. Eat the food of that country, in this case sukiyak which is horrible. Drink the liquor which is also horrible and make love to the girls, which in the case of Fumiko can would be delirious."

"Even though there's no chance?"

"I hate to be stuffy about this, son, but you Air Force men wouldn't understand. When you're a Marine there's always a chance."

"Even with those girls?"

"Son, when I was in New Zealand in the last war, waiting to hit Tarawa, there was a pretty barmaid in town and all the boys tried to make her. I didn't bother because there was also a very wealthy and famous gal who lived on a hill and you'll find as you grow older and wiser in the ways of the world that they're the gals to go for. Because they got everything: power, position, the mad acclaim of the world . . ." He dragged his hand back through his hair. "But there's one thing they ain't got—l'amour."

I started to ask why he was so sure they were lacking l'amour but he interrupted me and said, "Same with the Takarazuka girls. They got fame, wealth, their name in the bright lights . . ." He started to sob and concluded, "But it's all like ashes because they ain't got l'amour. And you watch, son! Takarazuka girls ain't none different from that there gal in old New Zealand. And I'm the guy who can bring l'amour into even the drabest life."

We went down to the shower room and while Mike was yammering away I had the stifling premonition that I ought to get out of Japan. When we returned to the hall Mike headed for his own room but I said, "Come on in a second," and we talked for a long time. I said, "I had the

strangest feeling just now. I wanted to get out of Japan. I was scared, I think." I started to tell him about my bad luck with Eileen and he interrupted.

"Don't tell me! The general's wife started to throw her books into you. I sized her up when she tossed a girl like Fumiko-san out of her third-rate club . . ." He shook my hand warmly and said, "Son, when you escaped Mr. General Webster, you escaped horrors worse than death."

"But I didn't want to escape," I said. "I wanted to marry Eileen and have a wife I could be proud of and a home somewhere and a good life in the Air Force. Everything was arranged and I liked it all."

"So now what?"

"I had the craziest feeling, Mike, that I was back in St. Leonard's."

"Where's that?"

"Prep school. I went to St. Leonard's. I was all set to take the exams for West Point, but there was a teacher there who loved English literature and he got me a part in the school play. It was by a Hungarian called Molna and all of a sudden I didn't want to go to West Point. I didn't want any part of it and my mother, who's written a couple of damned fine stories for the *Atlantic*, came to school and said, 'We've always expected you would go to the Point, like your father and his father.' I said, 'Suddenly I feel as if I'd had a vision of a completely different world.' At that she started to cry and talked pretty incoherently, but what I got was that if you ever once experienced that vision don't let anything stop you. She wouldn't come right out and say I shouldn't go to the Point, because her own father went there and became a pretty famous general. But I could see that that's what she meant."

"For the next two weeks I went through hell. Everybody at the school was just swell. They didn't rave at me and say I was ruining my life if I gave up the appointment to West Point, and the English teacher wouldn't say that if I did go to the Point I was selling out. But then Father

flew up from Texas and he was like a breath of sea air in a Kansas drought."

"He put you straight, eh?"

"No. Father never rants."

"He's a general isn't he? Then he rants."

"You Marines get the wrong idea sometimes. Just because a couple of generals fouled up Kojé-do, you take it for granted all Army generals are horses' necks."

"Right animal, wrong anatomy."

"If you ever meet my father you'll meet the man who justifies having generals. He looked at me that day and said, 'If you don't want to go to the Point, Lloyd, don't. Unhappiest men I know are those who've been forced into something they have no inner aptitude for.'"

"That was a noble start," Mike said, "but what did he use for the clincher?"

"What do you mean?"

"How did he apply the screws? How did he force you to go to the Point?"

"He didn't. We just talked and he flew back to Texas and I went on to the Point. And up to this very night I've never once been sorry. But tonight that old sick feeling came over me and I had the distinct impression that maybe I didn't want to stay in the Air Force and buck for a star. Maybe I didn't want to marry Eileen and mes around with her silly old man and cantankerous mother." I put my hand against my forehead and said, "Maybe I felt my whole world crumbling under me."

Mike grew serious and said, "Boy, do I know! I watched my old man go through the depression. I watched a world really crumble. That's why I don't put much stock in the permanent security of worlds—of any kind. But what hit you? You don't just decide a thing like that for the hell of it."

"Well . . . I'm almost ashamed to tell you what hit me."

Mike had a very quick mind and he said loudly, "Fumiko-san! You took a good look at Fumiko-san close up."

Well, son, she'd put anyone off his rocker—anyone, that is, but an old hand at l'amour like me."

I laughed and said, "I wish it were so simple. I could duel you for Fumiko-san in F-86's at 40,000 feet. But the other day I was best man at a marriage between a G.I. and a Japanese girl. Boy, she was no Fumiko-san, but she impressed me powerfully. Like a chunk of earth in the middle of a cheese soufflé. And tonight, seeing that other part of Japan I wondered . . ." Suddenly I clammed up and couldn't say it.

"You wondered what?" Mike asked. "You certainly don't want to snatch the enlisted man's wife."

"This sounds silly but I flew down here ready to marryileen. When she and I started to hesitate about that, I started to wonder about everything else—even about staying in the Air Force. I know it's ridiculous but that G.I. and his dumpy Japanese girl . . ."

Mike stared at me in slack-jawed horror and asked in a rushed voice, "You mean you're ponderin' life?" He ruffled his hair down over his eyes and sobbed, "Oh, what does it all mean—the eternal struggle—sex—the New York Yankees!"

"All right, louse it up. But suddenly I felt as if I were in a world of swirling darkness where the only reality was this earth—this earth of Japan."

"My God!" Mike cried, clutching his head. "A new Sigmund Freud!"

I had to laugh, and while Mike phoned down for some old beer I asked, "Don't you ever get crazy ideas like that?"

"A million of 'em. They never hurt anybody."

"But to have an idea like that suddenly bust open your whole world . . . I thought I was back in prep school again."

"I think it's easy to explain," Mike said after his second bottle of beer, which gave him added authority. "You've been fighting like crazy up in Korea and you get this big idea about comin' down to Japan and getting married . . ."

"She didn't even tell me she was coming to Japan."

"Don't let details mess up my theory. Then when you see the battle-axe her mother is . . ."

"She's not really a battle-axe."

"Who threw me out of the Club with Fumiko-san?" The question awakened all of Mike's animosities and launched him into a tirade against generals' wives and he never did finish his explanation.

But next night we were at the Bitchi-bashi watching the stately procession of Takarazuka girls as they approached us through the evening dusk to vanish into the deep shadows. I was deeply moved by the passage of these quiet figures and they appeared to me as members of a military group dedicated to their rituals and promotion the way I was tied to mine. They lived and acted with a sense of their military responsibility while I was conditioned by the rules of my army. They were not free and I was not free, for I believe that no man who flies a plane against the enemy or steers a ship into enemy waters is a free man. He is bound by certain convictions and restraints that other men never know.

I was pondering this when Fumiko-san came by. She was accompanied by the actress in men's clothes who had reprimanded us the night before and when the bobby-soxers on the Bitchi-bashi saw this tall girl they made a wild dash to surround her and demand autographs. The actress coolly shoved them away but other little girls took their places.

I said to Mike, "She must be somebody."

He asked a Japanese girl who the actress was and the girl broke into horribly confused giggles. She did, however, summon another girl—she couldn't have been more than fourteen—who spoke English and this child said "She—is—Hana-ogi-san. Number one girl"

I repeated the name and some children near me giggling furiously, began to chant "Hana-ogi-san!" and the beautiful actress stopped for a moment on the bridge and looked our way. Mike bowed very low and blew a kiss off his thumb to Fumiko-san but both actresses ignored him and resumed their way into the night shadows.

KATSUMI-SAN: "Japanese like gold teeth but I get white one for Joe."

I had to miss the Monday night procession at the Bitchibashi because General Webster sent a message ordering me in to Kobe to report on how my work was going. I knew what he really wanted was to ask me why I hadn't been around the Club. No doubt Mrs. Webster had commanded him to find out and I wondered what I would tell him. It was difficult for me to explain even to myself.

It had something to do with the fun of living with a gang of men that you can never explain. The relaxation, the freedom of running down the hall in your shorts, the common interests in a common problem. I remember how my father used to glow when he came in from a six-day exercise with his foot troops. I was a kid then but there was something enormously real and rugged about my father on those occasions. True, he was a fine man about the house—I think a good many other families, mothers and kids alike, would have been glad to have a father like mine—but there were times when he insisted upon living in a man's world and I think that much of his resolute determination to follow the camp fires rather than the bridge parties had been deeply ingrained in me. I had always liked aviation meetings like the ones at Itami. I liked evenings in Bachelor Officers' Quarters. I liked going with Mike to the little fish restaurant. And I liked getting a gang together on the spur of the moment, racing through the dark Japanese night and winding up at some American movie in Osaka or Kyoto. Most of all I enjoyed working at the air strip when somebody I knew in Korea boomed in with the latest hot scoop.

For example, one day a big Swede who flew an Air Force C-47 as a taxicab from one Korean air base to the next arrived in Itami and we had a long night of laughing about some of our experiences in that dismal country. I

Mrs. Webster didn't bother to telegraph hers. When we got to her apartment she asked bluntly, "What's wrong between you and Eileen?"

"I'm sure she must have told you."

"Lloyd, don't be evasive. You haven't seen her in more than a week."

It was obvious that this was one time when I'd better stick to the truth. I said, "We had a quarrel. She told me . . ."

"A quarrel? Whatever about?"

I gulped and said, "She's afraid I'm too much like my father." Mrs. Webster started at my honesty but made no move to stop me so I finished. "And I think she's—too bossy." There was something in the inflection of this sentence that betrayed clearly the fact that I thought Eileen was too damned much like her mother. But Mrs. Webster never batted an eye.

So I added, "And then I've been working."

"Ridiculous," she snapped. "Mark found you this job because there wasn't any work attached to it."

"If that's why I got it . . ." I began with standard dignity.

" . . . you'd sooner be back in Korea?" she concluded. "Yes."

"Lloyd, don't be silly. It's obvious to everyone in Kobe that you are an extremely brave young man whom General Webster brought back to Japan so that you could be with Eileen. There's nothing dishonest about that—if you plan to get married."

"We planned that for a long time—sort of."

"How do people get married—sort of?" She was sitting on an expensive lounge purchased in Paris and she leaned forward, repeating the offensive words: "Sort of?"

"I mean there's nothing definite. Has Eileen said there was anything definite?"

"Of course she hasn't. She hasn't talked with me about this but I can see how humiliating it is for her. The whole hotel . . ."

I knew Eileen pretty well and I was sure she didn't

give a hoot what the hotel thought. But Mrs. Webster did because if we didn't get married it would make her look ridiculous. I said, "We wonder if we're the right people for each other."

"At this stage? Why, you've known Eileen for years. Same backgrounds. I don't see . . ."

"But that's what Eileen said when she started this fight . . ."

"A fight! Lloyd, this is just a lovers' quarrel and it has no more significance than that."

"Maybe it didn't at the start but Eileen's questions and some of the thinking I've done made me wonder if perhaps my whole idea of life isn't wrong."

Now I had struck something serious and Mrs. Webster accepted it so. She spoke very deliberately and at the same time fidgeted nervously with a lace handkerchief. She said, "If an Army man ever questions the big idea of military service he's lost. Believe me, Lloyd, I've seen it many times and it's the worst thing that can happen to you. From your baby days you were cut out for the service. You've never known anything else."

I could have contradicted her and said that for two weeks—a long time ago—I had imagined another way of life but that would have raised too many questions which I couldn't have answered. It was one thing to confide such a secret to an easy-going mind like Mike Bailey's. It was quite different to give the idea away to Mrs. Webster. In three questions she'd have you undressed and you'd stand there naked to the world, just as stupid and silly as you were back at St. Leonard's.

I said, "Wouldn't it be better all around if your husband sent me back to my outfit?"

"In Korea?"

"Yes. That would settle my doubts."

To my surprise, she agreed. "It does seem better now. But it would be wrong for two reasons. It would make Eileen seem ridiculous. Couldn't hold her man. And it would be the cowardly thing for you to do."

"Eileen doesn't need me," I said.

"You're absolutely right, Lloyd. She's asked to partie every night. But not by Army men. By civilians in Army suits. Suppose she falls in love with one of these civilians. She'll settle down as a druggist's wife in Chicago and that's not for Eileen, believe me."

I found Mrs. Webster a lot too tough for an airman twenty-eight years old to handle. I said, "I'll drop in and say good night to the general."

But this woman kept hold of you like a steel trap. She said, "And there's a third reason why going back to Korea would be wrong. Because you would be running away from your fundamental problem."

I wanted to shout, "What I want to run away from you. I'm running away from your daughter because she so much like you." But a man can shoot down Russia and still be afraid to shoot down his commanding officer's wife. I said, "I'll call Eileen tomorrow."

She said, "Good. I know Eileen and I know she wants to marry you. Don't let lovers' quarrels keep you apart. That would be foolish." She tucked the handkerchief in her sleeve and added with powerful emphasis, "And do let a temporary uncertainty tease you into thinking you made a mistake on your whole life. You're an Army man, Lloyd. You were bred to it."

I found General Webster in a workroom lined with books. He indicated them with a wide sweep of his hand and said, "The colonel who had this suite three years ago got these books together. Practically any subject you might be interested in."

I said, "I suppose you know what Mrs. Webster and I were talking about. I think it would be better all around if you sent me back to Korea."

The general drummed his fingers and said, "Believe me, maybe, but it would be so damned obvious. That's what's wrong with military life. Every move can be so easily interpreted by the enemy. But damn it all, Lloyd, what's wrong between you and Eileen?"

"Nothing's wrong, sir. It's just that we both feel uncertain about our getting along—ultimately."

"Very sensible." He poured me a stiff drink and said, "You're not much of a man unless you're scared silly by the prospect of marriage. Take me. Night before my wedding your father had to get me blind drunk to keep me from sending a Western Union messenger to my wife's house. . . . Father was Colonel Keller—got into that serious scrape with the Persian Ambassador. They called it Persia then."

He related in his rambling way the case histories of half a dozen military marriages and of how all the men at some time before the wedding or after had wanted to funk out on the deal. "But in the long run," he assured me, "marriage is the best thing for any man. It was the making of me. And j'your father ever tell you about his classic wedding? He was engaged to your mother, Lieutenant-General Himmelwright's daughter, and two days before the wedding he fell in love with another girl. Just about went mad from indecision. But suppose he had gone off his rocker and said he wasn't cut out to be a general. By God, twenty years later America might of lost Guadalcanal."

He poured us a couple of more drinks and said, "Look at it this way, Lloyd. What the hell were you put in this world for? Be one of those washed-up old fuddies with no home of his own, sitting in a club somewhere yakkity-yakking about China?"

I guess the whiskey made me brave, for I said, "Ask Eileen if she'll have dinner with me tomorrow."

"Good boy!" the general cried, whamming me on the back. "I ordered my wife not to speak to you on such a subject. Humiliating to Eileen and all that. But Nancy said there came a time in every girl's love life . . . Isn't that a horrible word?"

"I'll call Eileen about twelve," I said.

General Webster tossed off an extra one and said, "I feel ten years younger. If you have children, Lloyd, have boys."

As I went down in the elevator I saw a new sign which read, "Officers of this command will not appear on the

streets of Kobe walking with girls of the indigenous personnel. This order also applies to officers when on the streets of Osaka and Kyoto. Signed, Mark Webster, Commanding." I thought, "Oh, boy! The general's wife is really determined to clean up all Japan," and then I got to laughing because here the American Army was forbidding its men to be seen with Japanese girls, while the Takarazuka army was forbidding its girls to be seen with American men.

I was still chuckling when the elevator doors opened and I heard my name. It was Pvt. Joe Kelly, wearing a service revolver as big as a cannon. He yelled, "At last the Air Force gave me a break. Transferred me to the Joint Message Center. I got the best job in Osaka." He waited for an officer to sign a receipt for important mail then joined me. His Ford was at the curb.

"Where can I drop you?" he asked, unstrapping his artillery.

"Look, I work at Itami."

"So what's the difference to me. The Army pays for the gasoline."

"And I live at Takarazuka."

"I'll go that way."

We piled in and he reported on how things were going with him and Katsumi. "We found a nice house. . . Say, Ace! It's early. Why not drive into Osaka and visit with us?"

He was so energetic and I was so interested in him in the way I had explained to Mike that I agreed. He barreled the Ford along the Kobe-Osaka road and I tried to observe exactly what this ancient and historic Japanese road was like. I saw the little paper-windowed houses stretching mile after mile, with never a sign of countryside. I saw the open-front stores that did business all night and the thousands of people moving along the road in the twilight and of how a single lamp lit in any of the houses seemed to light up the whole section of road near it.

But pretty soon I stopped thinking about Japan and asked, "How fast you driving, Joe?"

"Sixty-eight," he reported.

"Don't the M.P.'s ever pinch you for flying so low?"

"They all know me."

"I'll bet they do."

"First thing I did was invite 'em over to the house and Katsumi fed 'em special grub." He waited till a prowler car came along. Then he leaned way out and shouted some Japanese insults at the M.P. and everybody roared and Joe said, "Great bunch."

As we entered Osaka he bore to the south until we came to a road which dropped down beside one of the numerous canals. Soon it petered out and four Japanese kids assumed guard over the Ford while we hiked up a narrow alley down which two men trudged with wicker baskets of enormous size. As they passed each house light from the paper doors shone on them for a moment creating an impression of deep warmth.

At the far end of the alley stood an inconspicuous one-storied shack made of wood long since weatherstained to a blackish gray. The porch was outlined by concrete blocks which confined the center of packed earth. The roof was of orange tile, laid in Chinese fashion with a slight swoop upward at each end. In the States we would not have called this a house at all. With its sliding paper doors it would have been a shed, and cows or farm tools would have been kept there, but when Joe slid his doors back, there was Katsumi in a kimono, cooking the evening meal. Promptly she took my shoes and offered me a cup of bitter green tea and said in lovely, stilted English, "It is fine to see you among us tonight."

"She's been takin' English lessons," Joe said proudly, "and I study a little Japanese." He rattled off a few phrases and Katsumi beamed at him as if he had written an encyclopedia.

"It's nice here, Ace," Joe said expansively. "Two rooms, the canal down there, a good igh and good food. Ace, I'm

livin'. For the first time in my life I feel like a human bein'."

He showed me where to put my shoes and how to prop yself up with pillows as we sat on the tatami mats. He id, "I grew up in an orphanage but I was sort of adopted y a family. They found me disappointin' and deserted ie—not that I blame 'em, I was a stinker—so I went back o the orphanage and then to reform school. I tried to nlist in the Army for the last war but they trapped me to tellin' my real age and I wound up in Chicago and en the Air Force. Now I'm a family man." He looked at Katsumi with glowing approval and asked, "Notice the ig change, Ace?"

"I like the kimono," I said, for Katsumi was one of those rdinary Japanese girls who in flowing kimonos become lmost attractive.

"It ain't the kimono, Ace. Watch her smile!" In Japanese ie commanded his wife to smile but when she did so I till didn't catch on, so Joe cried, "The tooth, Ace! The ooth!" Then I saw. The big gold tooth had been removed und in its place some Army dentist had fitted a trim porce- ain crown. Katsumi really did look attractive in kimono and tooth.

"It's a reformation," I said.

"It's a miracle," Joe sighed. "And she don't giggle no more, do you, Babe?" He dragged Katsumi toward him and kissed her on the cheek. "Because I told her that if she ever giggled again and stuffed her fist in her mouth I'd break her arm off at the wrist." He gave Katsumi a solid wallop on the bottom and she giggled like mad, stuffing her hand into her mouth.

"Sometimes she forgets, Ace, but this is livin'."

He explained to his wife that I bunked at Takarazuka and she spoke in rapid Japanese which he interpreted for me: "A hell of a fine idea, Ace. We're goin' to Takarazuka tomorrow to see the new show. Join us."

"I'd like to, but I have a dinner date in Kobe."

"So what! Show's over by six and I'll race you right in to Kobe, no stops." He pulled an imaginary cord and made

like a train whistle. "It's a deal, Ace, because with Katsumi you'll really enjoy it. She knows all the actresses and can tell you what's goin' on."

He gave Katsumi a command in Japanese and she went to a chest where she kept her prized possessions, appearing shortly with a magazine in bright covers. It started at the back, the way Jap books do, and she showed me the photograph of a dazzling stage set. I asked what the magazine was.

"Fan magazine for the Takarazuka shows," Joe explained. "She subscribes to three of them." He shuffled a pile of colorful magazines and I could tell from the devoted way in which Katsumi put them back in order that she had once been one of the enchanted girls who stood each night by the bridge to watch the great stars pass. Now she had become the typical housewife who still treasured autographs of the leading actresses.

"I suppose she belongs to a fan club," I joked.

"Don't kid!" He spoke in Japanese again and Katsumi returned to the chest from which she handed me a stack of photographs. Apparently they went far back in time to when Katsumi had been a child. I asked, "Does she have the pictures of the girls who were in last month's show?"

Katsumi immediately shuffled through the pictures and assembled the entire cast of principals and explained what each did. She even sang two of the songs and I asked, "Does she know all the shows as well as this one?"

Joe patted her arm affectionately and said, "She never misses one. Hasn't for years."

"Then it's a date for tomorrow. But you promise to get me back to Kobe for dinner."

He didn't have to because when I called Eileen next day she played hard-to-get and told me abruptly, "I'm having dinner with a Marine." I said, "That's too bad. How about Friday?" and she said Friday was booked too, so I said, "Boy, I'm playing in tough luck. I'll call you later." But neither of us would have bet much money on what that later would be.

FUMIKO-SAN: "When Japan know
America win, my father kill himself
—honorable—Japanese style."

Actually, when I went to the theater that afternoon I was rather relieved. It seemed to me that Eileen and I were pretty well washed up and I didn't have to worry any more about Mrs. Webster. I said to Joe, "I'm sort of steamed up to see this show," but I was hardly prepared for what Takarazuka did to *Madame Butterfly*. At any moment they might run in a scene unconnected with anything that had gone before or would come after. There were old Japanese dances to please the classical fans, jitterbugging to represent 1890 America, wrestling, microphones, a dance hall sequence, mutiny aboard an American ship, twenty stupid Japanese cops and a fire.

But running through this burlesque of a great opera there was one solid thread: ridicule of American military men. I have to admit that Mike Bailey's girl, Fumiko-san, was terrific as a ravishing geisha holding the American fleet at bay. Her fine long face and expressive movements made her hilarious when wrestling with a drunk G.I. on leave in Tokyo. There was nothing really offensive with her pantomime but you felt that all the Japanese in the audience were egging her on because they had had a bellyful of Americans.

But the star's performance was quite different. The girl in slacks who had reprimanded us in the restaurant played this part and her Lieutenant Pinkerton was blatantly ridiculous. He was arrogant, ignorant and ill-mannered. Yet at the same time the actress herself seemed more essentially feminine than any of the other girls on stage and it was this that made her version of Pinkerton so devastating. She was all Japanese women making fun of all American men.

One act of such petty nonsense was enough for me. I

didn't think I was stuffy, but I couldn't tolerate people making cheap fun of men in uniform, and when the people doing the burlesque were Japanese I drew the line. When the Act I curtain fell I got up to go, but Katsumi put her hand on mine and said, "No, no! Now is the best!"

From a side entrance the star appeared dressed in old-style samurai costume, pursued by two villains. They attacked her, and in the highly ritualistic dance which followed I for the first time fell under the spell of Japanese art.

I cannot tell you what there was about this dance that captivated me. It might have been the haunting music, for now the Western instruments like violins and oboes were silent and in their place were three horribly weird sounds: the hammering of a slack-headed drum, the clicking of wooden blocks thumped together, and the piercing wail of an Asiatic flute. Or it might have been the dazzling curtain before which she danced, a vast gold-and-blue-and-red affair with eight gigantic embroidered irises standing in solemn Oriental perfection. But mostly it was this remarkable woman I had seen in the restaurant, this Hana-ogi. She wore no shoes, only white tabi drawn tightly about her feet and it was principally her feet that impressed me. She used them as a very great artist might and slowly I became aware that I was watching one of the greatest dancers in the world. She danced in the Japanese manner, she wove back and forth between the assailants. Instead of a sword she used the traditional symbol, her right hand held a fan. As I watched this hand it traced a wonderful pattern against the gold curtain. I had never before seen a dancer like this, one who could fill an entire stage with her authority.

The scene came to a hurried close with Hana-ogi stamping an unforgettable rhythm and weaving that bright hand through the darkness. The crowd burst into applause and I whispered to Kelly, "Tell Katsumi I'd like

'em all." But when he spoke to his wife she became grave and Joe reported, "Katsumi says that your particular girl wouldn't speak to an American."

"Why not?"

"We hung her brother as a war criminal. Killed her father with our bombs."

I sat back in my seat and, strange as it may seem, felt exactly the same kind of relief I did when I heard that Eileen couldn't have dinner with me. I had the distinct sensation that I was back in St. Leonard's engulfed in important decisions that I simply couldn't make. At that moment I desperately wanted to be in a jet plane rousting about up around the Yalu. Up there I felt safe and here in Japan I felt dreadfully loused up. As if I were coming back to earth from another world I looked at Joe and

said, "Jesus! What am I doing? Lloyd Gruver, West Point '44, propositioning an enlisted man to arrange a date with a Japanese girl!" I said to Joe, "Let's get some

Joe said, "Why not? We'll blow and Katsumi can come home by train."

Right there I could have avoided all that followed, but I cried, "No! I didn't mean that. I want to see the rest." Then I asked, "How does Katsumi happen to know an actress like that?"

Joe laughed and grabbed his wife's handbag, rummaging through it till he found half a dozen pictures. They were all of the dancer, showing her in some of her famous poses. She was a Spanish bullfighter, Venetian gondolier, Broadway playboy and a Japanese samurai. She was always the man and she always looked devastatingly feminine.

Joe explained, "Katsumi organized a fan club. Osaka girls who idolized Hana-ogi."

"What's her last name?"

Joe asked Katsumi and said, "Just Hana-ogi. It's a stage name. My wife is crazy about her. Until Katsumi married her she was a real moron. Used to stand in the rain to see the goddess."

"But why?"

"Look, Ace. Suppose you were fat and dumpy and had to work like a slave all day. Then there's this tall, slim, beautiful girl who's famous all over the country and makes a lot of dough. One actress like Hana-ogi proves what a girl can become. If you ever break into our house you steal the pots and pans but don't steal these photographs. Katsumi worships them."

Katsumi understood our conversation but said nothing. Quietly she recovered the photographs, restored them to some preferred order and replaced them in her bag. Then she explained in broken English the story of Act II, which she read from one of the magazines which Takarazuka mailed out to its faithful patrons. It contained a large picture section, which I leafed through. I saw some sixty excellent photographs of the Takarazuka girls off stage. They were knitting, or skiing, or promenading, or going to a symphony concert, or strolling. Gradually I began to notice a curious pattern. Always the girls were in pairs or larger groups. Never were they alone and never with men. The photographs portrayed a rich and successful and celibate world and I recalled Mike's insistence that a wise man always looks for love in that kind of world, because, as Mike so eloquently pointed out, such women have everything but l'amour. I felt this especially when I saw the three photographs of Mike's Fumiko-san. She was perhaps the most striking of the Takarazuka girls.

"New York?" He whispered back, "I never been to New York."

But Katsumi heard my question and she realized even before I did that I was determined to meet Hana-ogi that day, so in the darkness she touched my hand and said, "After, we go on flower walk. I speak you to Hana-ogi-san."

When the final curtain fell on *Butterfly* I started to leave but again Katsumi whispered, "No, Ace-san. Now everybody so beautiful." Quickly the curtain opened and there was the entire cast of 120 standing in glorious kimonos, singing a farewell song. A runway reached out into the audience and the stars came down and posed right above us. Our seats were such that Hana-ogi stood very near me and for the first time I saw her in woman's clothes. She was adorable. True, she was also proud and combative, nervously excited at the end of an extremely long performance. But above all else she was adorable in her triumphant moment. Her kimono, I remember, was green and white.

Katsumi now led me through the crowd and we came to the flower walk and the tiny little gate through which the Takarazuka girls passed on their way to the Bitchibashi. A large crowd had assembled to applaud them as they appeared and dozens of round-faced little girls pressed tight against the gate, hoping to touch the great actresses, and as I looked at the girls it seemed incredible that any of these pudgy figures might one day grow up to replace Fumiko-san or Hana-ogi.

Now the lesser Takarazuka girls appeared, then Fumiko-san and the dancers in green skirts and leather zori. At last the leading actresses came through the gate as the crowd pressed in upon them and above the clamoring heads I saw cool Hana-ogi. We looked at each other cautiously, as if testing to see if either had been offended, then slowly she moved toward me through the great press of people and I think my mouth fell open slightly, for on this day, fresh from triumph, she was a glorious woman.

Katsumi broke the spell by catching Hana-ogi's hands

and gabbling away in Japanese. Finally she said to me, "Hana-ogi-san hope you like her play." The tall actress looked at me over Katsumi's shoulder and I replied quietly, "I liked the play but not the American sailors."

Katsumi reported this and Hana-ogi blushed and said something which Katsumi was reluctant to translate. "Go ahead!" Joe insisted.

"Hana-ogi-san say Americans to be funny. Not bad." She pressed her hands into her stomach and indicated laughter.

"It wasn't funny," I said. Hana-ogi caught my meaning and frowned, so I added quickly, "But Hana-ogi-san's dancing was wonderful." I imitated her fight with the villains and she smiled.

Hana-ogi's other fans now pressed in upon us and I said awkwardly, "Why don't we four have dinner?" But when Katsumi translated this, Hana-ogi grew very angry, said something harsh and passed abruptly down the flower walk.

I now entered upon a week of dream sequences. The Korean fighting must have exhausted me more than I knew, for my sudden relaxation on the make-believe job at Itami permitted my nerves to find their own level. It wasn't high and I felt as I had once at the Point when we were about to play Navy and I was certain I would louse up the works. At other times I imagined I was back in St. Leonard's totally confused about whether or not I wanted to attend the Point.

Sometimes at night I would wake with a start and believe myself to be in a falling jet fighter up at the Yalu River, and I would struggle to regain control both of the plane and of myself. Then, as I lay in the dark Japanese night I would see hurrying across my midnight wall that lone, exquisitely lovely Takarazuka girl I had seen on the Bitchi-bashi that first day and I would try to hurry after her and find her name.

But in all these imaginings I was kidding myself and I knew it. For inevitably I would think of Hana-ogi-san and I would see her dancing and I would follow the sub-

the curves of her adorable body and I would see her oval face smiling at me, ever so small a Japanese smile, and I would wonder how a man could be so tossed about by the mere idea of a girl. I had not really spoken to her. I knew nothing of her character or her personality, but almost willingly I was hypnotizing myself over this strange girl. Much later I would recognize that I was creating for myself the image of love and that without this image a man could well live an entire and empty life.

So each evening I fed my delirium by standing at the Bitchi-bashi to watch Hana-ogi pass by and if, during the preceding hours, I had by chance begun to question whether she really was as lovely as I imagined, one sight of her dispelled that heresy. She was even more desirable. On Friday I returned to see *Swing Butterfly* and at the final promenade I applauded so loudly that Hana-ogi had to look at me, but she betrayed nothing and looked quickly away. Saturday night I was really jittery and Mike Bailey dragged me along on another secret date he had with Fumiko-san and I spent most of the evening questioning her about the Takarazuka girls, hoping that she would speak of Hana-ogi.

Fumiko-san said, "My father famous man but he kill himself when Japanese surrender. No money no hope for me. I read in paper Takarazuka seek new girls. I brush my hair each night, study dance, shout with my voice. I chosen and one year I work ten hours each day and think this my one chance. Supervisor like me and I go Moon Troupe with Hana-ogi-san. She kind to me and I act parts good. I live dormitory with other girls but best time when Moon Troupe go Tokyo."

I said, "You in love with someone in Tokyo?"

"Love? How I love someone?"

"Aren't you going to get married?"

She looked at me quizzically. "I Takarazuka girl. What else could I want be?"

Her answer so amazed me that I did an impulsive thing which astonished me as much as it did Fumiko-san. I took her hands in mine and said quietly, "Tonight, when you

go back to the dormitory you must speak with Hana-ogi-san. Tell her that I am in love with her and must see her."

Fumiko-san withdrew her hands and said in dismay, "Never hoppen! Hana-ogi-san never speak men. And with American! Never hoppen!"

"You tell her," I repeated, for I was convinced that no one could dance as passionately as Hana-ogi without knowing the outlines and purpose of love. I knew that she could not refuse to see me.

The next afternoon Joe Kelly drove out to Itami and said abruptly, "Wife says you're to be at our house for supper at seven."

"I can't make . . ."

"Be there, Ace," the sawed-off squirt said ominously.

"I've already . . ."

"Be there, Bub. Hana-ogi's comin'."

THE WOODCARRIER: "Japanese girls
nice to kiss—yes?"

I cannot remember how, exactly, I got to Joe Kelly's house that night, but when I finally turned up the alley from the canal, when at last I saw the little wooden building and the sliding paper doors my heart was hammering like thunder. I slammed the doors aside and rushed in expecting to see Hana-ogi standing there. Instead Joe and Katsumi were horsing around and cooking food. They told me to sit on the floor and from that position watched this couple in love and it occurred to me that myself had never lived in a house where love was. My parents loved each other in the required way and I am quite sure that General and Mrs. Webster loved each other, but it was always love for some ultimate purpose: army advancement, social position in Lancaster, children. Here I was visiting the house of love itself.

"Joe," I asked as we waited for Hana-ogi, "what was it you told me in Korea? American husbands talk about country clubs and getting junior's teeth fixed?"

"Yeah, but if they're married to Japanese girls they talk about love."

"Suppose you went back to the front now . . ."

"God fabbid."

"What would you talk about?"

Joe held Katsumi off at arm's length and said, "Topic for tonight. Ace, I fought to get this baby and I'm satisfied with what I got." Then he spoke to her in Japanese and she burst into an uncontrolled giggle. She started to jam her hand into her mouth but Joe gave it a terrific belt and said, "Honest to God, Ace, it's easier to train a dog."

As he said this the door opened and Hana-ogi entered. Softly and with infinite grace she slid the doors closed

behind her and slipped out of her zori. She was dressed in a gray-blue kimono and her hair was rumped. She stood so silently that Joe and Katsumi did not realize she was there; so while their backs were still turned I stumbled awkwardly to my knees and started toward her, finally gaining my feet. She laughed at my discomfort and the sound of her voice was so gentle that I was compelled to reach down and take her hands to my lips and try to kiss them, but as I did so she instinctively pulled them away and I noticed with indescribable emotion that they were a decided ivory. I stood aside to let her pass and said, "I am so glad you came." She did not understand my words but even so she nodded in acknowledgment and I thought that she was less irritated than she had been when I tried to kiss her hand—and for my part I knew that she was twice as beautiful as I had ever seen her on the stage when she was dressed in men's clothes.

Katsumi now hurried forward and embraced the actress while Joe greeted her in broken Japanese, at which she laughed heartily, and I got the distinct impression that she was not at all the remote glamorous girl I had stared at on the Bitchi-bashi, for her gentle good humor was exactly what you would expect from a good, happy country girl working in the city.

But I had seen only two aspects of Hana-ogi and she was infinite, for when I asked Katsumi what her last name was and when Katsumi blushed and said she wouldn't dare ask that question I insisted, and when Hana-ogi heard Katsumi translate she grew extremely angry. I couldn't understand what was happening but Katsumi, blushing a fiery red which showed through her yellow cheeks, said, "Takarazuka girl never tell her real name."

"What do you mean, her real name?"

"Her name not Hana-ogi. Only stage name."

"What is her real name?" I insisted.

Katsumi spoke to the actress and the only word I understood was America and Hana-ogi grew very solemn

and spoke harshly, after which Katsumi said, "She will not say her name. Even I don't know that."

Joe interrupted and said, "That's the way with all professional girls in Japan—geishas—whores . . ."

"Wait a minute!" I cried. "This girl . . ." I reached out to take her hand, but she drew away from me and Katsumi said, "More better we eat."

It was a pretty formal meal. I asked a half dozen questions, none of which Hana-ogi really answered and it was not until Katsumi produced an album of Hana-ogi's pictures that there was any real animation. Then the two girls spoke in rapid Japanese, laughed a lot and sang bits of songs from the famous shows Hana-ogi had starred in. Finally the ice thawed a bit and I learned that Hana-ogi came from the north of Japan, where a woman in a nearby village had once seen a Takarazuka show in Tokyo. This woman had suggested that Hana-ogi apply for the examinations. Her father had been killed in the B-29 raids on Tokyo. Her brother had been hung for what he did to American soldiers in a prisoner-of-war camp.

Hana-ogi's willingness to tell of her family encouraged me to speak and I said I had a good start in the Air Force and with my background I surely ought to become a colonel and from there on it was the roll of the dice. I said that if I did become a general I hoped I would be as good a one as my father. She asked his name and when I said Hot Shot Harry Gruver she grew silent and Katsumi said, "All Japanese know Gruver-san—Guadalcanal." The evening grew formal again.

Hana-ogi rose and indicated that she must go. I was deeply agitated at having seen her, having talked with her—even though it was in translation—and I did not want to have her go. I said, "Katsumi, please ask her to stay."

Hana-ogi replied something sharp which Katsumi refused to translate. When I insisted she stood stubbornly silent, so I appealed to Hana-ogi, who looked at me in a quiet, submissive Japanese way which betrayed no emotion, but which dared me to budge her one inch.

Softly, as if she were a child of seven, she said, "America . . . no!" I could sense in her gentle reply a finality of hatred and steel, but she bowed slightly, smiled with an infuriating complacency, and looked back at me from the sliding doors. "America . . . no!" she repeated softly, but long after she had gone I recalled the graceful way she bent down by the doors to put on her zori, the rare delicacy with which she arranged her kimono, so in spite of persistent apprehension that I was headed for trouble, I determined that no matter what she thought of Americans, no matter what orders Camp Kobe handed down regarding Japanese girls, I was going to see her again.

For the next two nights nothing happened. I posted myself at the Bitchi-bashi to watch the procession of girls and when I saw Hana-ogi, her hair in the wind, step upon the bridge at the opposite end, my heart actually hammered like one of those riveting machines you fix airplane wings with. God, she was like a medieval princess walking out from the palace. She was so straight and proud and sure of herself. And her black eyes shining out like fires from her golden face . . .

"Son, you got it bad!" Mike Bailey warned me on the second night.

"I'm going to see that girl. Tomorrow."

"Son, are you taking this seriously?"

I turned to look at Mike and he seemed to be a complete stranger. "Don't you take Fumiko seriously?" I asked. "Who started this, anyway?"

"Fumi-chan?" he laughed. "Son, a Marine has to be involved with a pretty girl or he isn't a Marine. But who could get serious over a Takarazuka girl? They got sawdust for hearts."

"What is this?" I asked. "A little while ago you were telling me . . ."

Mike scratched his head and said, "I had a cousin once who came to stay with me right before a big high-school basketball game. I looked at the ugly little squirt and said, 'Hell, he can't be gettin' measles.' But he was and I was quarantined. Son, I think you're gettin' measles."

I said, "Tomorrow night I'm going to storm that Bitchibashi and I'm going to have a date with that girl."

"Son," Mike said, "you can't have measles but, by God, there are red spots!"

Prudently he stayed away from the bridge on that third night and as the first Takarazuka girls crossed I felt my heart hammering again and soon there was Hana-ogi, accompanied by three other stars, and I stepped right into the middle of them and took Hana-ogi's hand and brought its yellow knuckles right up to my lips and kissed it. Then I said, "I have got to see you," but none of the girls spoke English and Hana-ogi drew her hand away and started to leave, but I no longer gave a damn so I grabbed her by the shoulder and swung her around and kissed her on the lips. We kept our eyes open and I remember that in this crazy moment I could not tell whether her eyes were slanted or not, but they were very black, like the sky at night.

She pushed me away and crossed the bridge and I heard behind me the muttering of Japanese men and I thought, "Oh, damn, a public mess and I'll be court-martialed," but when I turned there was no animosity. The men were laughing and one old fellow with a load of wood pointed at some more Takarazuka girls approaching on the bridge and made motions encouraging me to kiss them too, but I hurried back to the Marine Barracks, where Mike Bailey greeted me with a pair of field glasses and the crack, "It looked good, son. The subtle approach. Grrrr."

I said, "I promised to see her tonight. I did."

He said, "Ace, don't let this thing get you. If you want to make a play for a pretty actress—O.K. But don't let it get you. Frankly, you looked silly as hell down there on the bridge."

In a few minutes a Japanese boy appeared with a message for Mike and he said, "Fumi-chan wants to see me in the restaurant. She wants you to come along."

When we got there Makino-san, the cook, had already

ard of my behavior and he gave me hell. "Very important in Japan these girls. You do much wrong, Ace-san."

"What did I do?" I demanded. "I kissed a girl."

"A Takarazuka girl," he said with reverence. Before I could argue further Fumiko-san appeared, extremely beautiful and very feminine. She did not cry but she did plead with me and said that something like that could happen to a Takarazuka girl and that if Hana-ogi ever lost her mother and her younger sisters . . . "She very poor, Hana-ogi," Fumiko told me.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You Americans not know what poor is. Hana-ogi never tasted meat until she came to Takarazuka. Never had one piece of nice clothes. Ace-san, you not speak her again—please?"

She told me that Hana-ogi's only chance in life—her only opportunity to escape from terrible poverty—was to become a Takarazuka girl. "I know this girl," she said solemnly. "Before she comes for examination not eat for three days to get . . . How you . . ." She indicated a permanent wave.

She said there was already a likelihood that Hana-ogi might become one of the rare lucky ones—kept on at Takarazuka forever "as teacher of the dancing" when her days as an actress were over. "Here is good life for Hana-ogi-san. There is no other."

I asked Fumiko why she risked seeing Mike Bailey and she laughed. "I not great success. I not poor girl. My family making lots of money again."

Then she pleaded, "Do not come to the bridge again, Ace-san. Please?"

I wanted to see Hana-ogi, I wanted to see her eyes close to mine and her golden face pressed against my lips, but I said, "I promise." To my surprise Fumiko-san kissed me, her beautiful Japanese face leaning across the table, and she said, "American men so good. Even when Hana-ogi-san come home tonight and say, 'American men so good,' I speak her they all right."

But although I kept my promise not to haunt the bridge

meant nothing, for the very next morning Joe Kelly wheeled up to Itami Air Field and said with real joy, "Dinner again tonight, Ace!"

My heart must have bled out through my eyes, for he laughed and said, "Yep. Hana-ogi came into Osaka last night and talked with Katsumi for three hours."

"What did she say?"

"How should I know?" And he rattled off a jumble of Japanese.

I wish that throughout the rest of my life I could occasionally know the excitement that captured me that night. I shaved at Itami, polished my shoes and set out for Osaka. I went nearly crazy in a tiny Japanese taxicab. The driver was all smiles and said yes, he understood just where I wanted to go, but we wound up in hell, I think, and in desperation I had to get a little boy to lead me back to the main station and I went to Joe's house on the way. I thrust back the sliding doors and cried, "Hana-ogi, where?" But she was not there. Katsumi was alone, singing to herself as she prepared dinner. I sat on the floor and watched her time-christened movements over the charcoal stoves that Japanese women have used for centuries. For there were no can openers, no frozen foods. Each item was laboriously prepared by hand and as Katsumi did this ancient work she hummed old songs and seemed to me that she grew lovelier each day—but how truly lovely I was to learn in a few minutes.

For little Joe Kelly came busting into the house trembling with anger. He threw a package on the floor and yelled, "This son-of-a-bitch of a colonel!"

I had heard Joe sound off against officers before and I tried to tone him down, but this time he had real cause. "This bastard, Colonel Calhoun Craford! He rides me. Every damned day he rides me."

I happened to be watching Katsumi at the brazier. She never looked up, but I could see a terrible tenseness come over her entire body. Her ankles, in their white tabi socks, trembled slightly and I knew she was desperately afraid of her man.

For I had heard of this Calhoun Craford, a tough guy who hated colored people. Joe said, "Every guy in that outfit who's married to a Japanese girl goes through hell with this bastard Craford."

Katsumi, aware that Joe's trouble had been caused by her, now left the charcoal brazier and came into the middle of the room. She pushed Joe down onto a pillow and took off his shoes. "You not to come on tatami with shoes, Joe," she said softly. She brought him a tiny cup of hot sake wine and when he had drunk this she led him into the other room where there was a Japanese bath and soon I could hear tensed up little Joe Kelly, the dead-end kid, sloshing about in the tub while his patient wife soused him with cold water and rubbed his back. After a while they joined me and Joe scratched himself under the dark blue kimono Katsumi had made him. He said, "To hell with Colonel Craford. Look what I got!" And he produced a bottle of Italian wine which Katsumi took.

Then, as we heard the soft click of zori on the alley stones, we all fell silent and I think Joe and Katsumi were as excited as I, although their hearts couldn't have been pounding as hard. The paper doors slid back and there was Hana-ogi in a green-and-gold kimono, her lips slightly parted in a smile, her brilliant eyes glowing from her night walk and her jet black hair mussed by the wind that blew along the canal. She started to speak but I caught her in my arms and kissed her. This time we closed our eyes, but when we finally drew apart—for she was kissing me too—she passed the back of her hand across her forehead and I think she knew then that for a girl dedicated to Takarazuka and a man dedicated to American military life love could result only in tragedy and she pushed my hand away from hers and gently removed her zori and sat down on the tatami and spoke quietly to Katsumi, who spoke to Joe in Japanese, and all three of them fumbled around, not knowing how to translate what Hana-ogi had said, so she held out her hand to me and invited me to sit upon the mat.

After dinner Katsumi said, "Joe, we take walk." Hana-ogi did not protest and as soon as the fragile doors slid shut I took her in my arms.

We sat upon the mats unable to say a word. I put my finger on her wonderful face and said, "Nice," but she could not understand. She gave me some instructions in Japanese but all I could do was shrug my shoulders, so she laughed and grabbed my big toe and pulled my cramped legs out straight and patted my knees, indicating that I must be stiff from sitting Japanese style. Then she made a pillow for my head in her lap and in that way we continued our meaningless conversation on the tatamis.

It was apparent to each of us that we would meet many times, but that when she passed me on the Bitchi-bashi she would look straight ahead and it was also apparent that she intended us to be lovers—but not on this first quiet night—and that as the days went by we would postpone one decision after another until finally some external force, say Takarazuka or General Webster, intervene to make the climactic decisions for us, but as she looked down at me with calm eyes, as her wonderful hands held my face and as her slim, graceful legs stretched out last beside mine on the tatami mats, one question at least was answered. I had often wondered how a self-respecting American could get excited about a Japanese girl. Now I knew.

When it came time to leave, Hana-ogi refused to be seen with me on the street and caught a train back to Takarazuka. Joe drove me over to Itami, where I took the bus to Takarazuka, but something must have delayed Hana-ogi's train, because when I got to my room and looked out at the Bitchi-bashi, there was Hana-ogi crossing in the April moonlight. I rushed down to speak with her but she passed proudly by, her cream-colored zori going pin-toed along the railroad track to her dormitory.

I didn't sleep much that night because when I got back to my room I found a letter which had been delivered by special messenger. It contained a routine reminder

of recent orders issued by Camp Kobe and along the foot in capital letters I read: ANY PUBLIC DISPLAY WHATSOEVER OF AFFECTION FOR A JAPANESE NATIONAL BY A MEMBER OF THIS COMMAND IS FORBIDDEN. OFFICERS SHOULD NOT EVEN APPEAR ON PUBLIC STREETS ACCOMPANIED BY WOMEN OF THE INDIGENOUS PERSONNEL.

I knew that I was entangled in a ridiculous situation, for I could not walk with Hana-ogi in the city and she could not walk with me in town. If General Webster caught me dating a Japanese girl I would be disciplined and if the Takarazuka people heard of Hana-ogi dating an American she would be fired from the Moon Troupe. It seemed like something borrowed from the play I was in at St. Leonard's. Then I was a prince trying to prevent my niece from marrying a penniless schoolteacher. The kid who played the schoolteacher was a miserable drip in real life and I remember that on-stage I became pretty outraged, but now it was happening to me, and Mrs. Webster riding herd on me and the Takarazuka railroad company protecting their investment in Hana-ogi were going to be a lot tougher than a Ruritanian prince played by seventeen-year-old Lloyd Gruver.

For about two hours that morning as I lay awake—from three to five—I decided the whole affair was too damned silly, but toward dawn I began to see Hana-ogi dancing along the wall of my room and her classical postures, the stamping of her feet and the gestures of her right hand allured me so that I could think only of her tight and disciplined body. My thoughts were filled with the grace of her movement and as the sun rose I fell asleep knowing that somewhere within the triangle of the three cities we would meet.

OLD FARMER: "Each drop of fertilizer I place against the stalk of the plant by hand—not to waste any."

came unexpectedly. On a warm day in May I waited for Hana-ogi at the Bitchi-bashi but she did not appear and disconsolately I wandered down to the railroad station to purchase a ticket back to Itami, but as I approached the cage I saw Hana-ogi standing off to one side, holding a ticket in her hand and impulsively, even though we were in the heart of Takarazuka, she came to me and we went to the ticket cage together and we bought two tickets for a small town at the end of the line, and on this lovely day we walked for the first time through the ancient Japanese countryside.

Hana-ogi, unable to speak a phrase of English, and quite as dumb in Japanese, walked along the rice fields and across the little ridges that ran like miniature footpaths beside the irrigation ditches. We nodded to old women working the fields, laughed at children, and watched the white birds flying. Hana-ogi wore her green and white kimono and her cream zori and she was a bird herself, the May wind catching at her loose garments and the branches of trees tousling her delicate hair.

Wherever we went the land was crowded. Where in Texas there would be one farmer here there were forty. Where the footpaths in New Hampshire might be crowded with three people, here it was overwhelmed with fifty. There were no vacant fields, no woodlots, no mossy banks beside the wandering streams. On every foot of land were people and no matter how far we walked into the countryside there were always more people. More than any day I ever lived in my life I treasure this day because I discovered not only Hana-ogi's enormous love but I also discovered her land, the tragic, doomed

and of Japan, and from it I learned the fundamental secret of her country: too many people.

In Korea we used to joke about enlisted men who bought Japanese girls of sixteen or seventeen—a man could buy a young girl anywhere in Japan—and we thought it a horrible reflection on Japan, but today I saw that it would always be possible to find some Japanese farmer who would be eager to sell his daughter to a kind man, for if she stayed at home and had to fight for her share of the skimpy rice in the family bowl she could never do as well as if she went off with a man who could buy rice for her. All the problems we used to laugh about as being so strange—so unlike America—I saw explained this afternoon. The Japanese were no different from us. Their farmers loved their daughters exactly as Iowa farmers love theirs. But there was not enough land. There was never enough food.

I thank God for that May evening walking among the rice fields while the crickets droned at us, for if I had not seen this one particular old man tending his field I am sure that when I finally learned the terrifying truth about Hana-ogi I could no longer have loved her; but having seen this old man and his particles of soil I loved her the more.

He stood where a trail turned off from the main road, leaving in the joint a thin sliver of useless land that in America would have been allowed to grow up in burdock. In Japan this tragic triangle was a man's field, the sustenance of one man's large family. On this May night he was bent over the field, digging it to a depth of fourteen inches. The dug soil he placed reverently to one side until his tiny field was excavated. Then, as we watched, he took each handful of soil and gently pulverized it, allowing it to return to its bed. Pebbles he tossed aside and sticks and foreign things, and in the two days that followed this man would finger each item of his soil. Not for him a plow or a harrow, but the gnarled fingers and the bending back.

It is difficult

explain how Hana-ogi explained them to me. By pointing, by gesturing, by little pantomimes with the old man she explained that he was like her father except that her father's field—before the American bombs killed him—was slightly bigger. But her father had nine children.

It was breathlessly apparent to us as the sun sank below the distant hills that in terribly crowded Japan Hana-ogi and I were seeking a place in which to make love. There was now no thought of Japanese or American. We were timeless human beings without nation or speech or different color. I now understood the answer to the second question that had perplexed me in Korea: "How can an American who fought the Japs actually go to bed with a Jap girl?" The answer was so simple. Nearly a half million of our men had found the simple answer. You find a girl as lovely as Hana-ogi—and she is not Japanese and you are not American.

As we walked into the twilight we drew closer together. She took my hand and also took my heart and as dusk fell over us we searched more urgently from side to side. We were no more looking at the white birds or the old men bending over their fields. We were looking for a refuge—any kind of refuge—for we were desperately in love.

I remember that once I thought I saw a grove of trees but they were houses, for random trees were not allowed to grow in Japan. Again Hana-ogi pointed to a barn, but it was occupied. In Japan there was not even spare land for love.

But at last we came to a structure that was familiar to me, two inclined massive poles with two more set across them at the top like an enormous capital A, flat at the point. It was the timeless symbol of a Shinto shrine and here there were trees, but as always there were people too. We watched them come through the towering A, stand silently before the shrine, clap their hands three times, bow and depart, the torn white paper and the rice ropes of their religion fluttering quietly in the wind above them.

Hana-ogi took my hand and led me past the shrine until we came to a grassy bank partially protected by four trees. Villagers passed ten feet from us and dogs barked nearby. Across the mound we could see the dim lights of houses, for there was no empty countryside as I had known it in America. There was no place where there were not people. But at last we had to ignore them and it seemed to me as I sank beside Hana-ogi in the May twilight that we were being watched by the million eyes of Japan.

I remember vividly two things that happened. I had no conception of a kimono and thought it a kind of wrap-around dress but when we embraced and it was clear that Hana-ogi intended that we love completely, I tried to undo this gossamer dress, but it led to another and then another and to still more and although we could not speak we fell to laughing at my astonishment. Then suddenly we laughed no more, for I was faced with the second vast occurrence of the day, for when in the fading light I at last saw Hana-ogi's exquisite body I realized with shock—even though I was prepared to accept it—that I was with a girl of Asia. I was with a girl whose complete body was golden and not white and there was a terrible moment of fear and I think Hana-ogi shared this fear, for she caught my white arm and held it across her golden breasts and studied it and looked away and then as quickly caught me to her whole heart and accepted the white man from America.

We returned at last to Takarazuka and as we approached that lovely place we went into separate cars and I waited long till Hana-ogi had disappeared across the Bitchi-bashi before I appeared on the streets, heading for the Marine Barracks. Mike Bailey was in the shower and when he heard me go by he yelled and brought me back to military life with a fearful bang.

He said, "Mrs. Webster saw me in Kobe today and asked me a lot of questions."

"What'd'j tell her?"

"It isn't so much what I told her as what she asked." He waited for me to press the point, but I called downstairs for some cold beer and he said, "She asked me if you were going with a Japanese girl."

I sort of gulped on my beer and Mike said promptly, "Of course I said no. You aren't, are you?"

I took another drink of beer and pondered a long time what I ought to say. Then the pressing desire to talk with someone overcame me and I said, "I've been walking with Hana-ogi. We must have walked for five miles and I'm so deep in love . . ."

Mike was a fine character to talk with at a time like this. He laughed and said, "I feel like a traitor, Ace; getting you into this. Hell, I'm the one who's supposed to be in love."

I said, "It hit me like a propeller zinging around when you aren't looking. Jesus, Mike, I tell you the truth, I'm desperate."

Mike laughed again and said, "No need for a guy to be desperate in Japan. If you can't cuddle up to Hana-ogi because she's an actress, there's always the Tiger of Takarazuka. Better men than you . . ."

I started to say boldly, "But we . . ." My voice trailed off and I ended lamely, "The stars came right down and knocked me out."

Mike looked at me quizzically, then said without joking, "Look, Ace, I know better than most men around here how sweet a Japanese girl can be. But don't get involved. For the love of God, Ace, don't get involved."

"I am involved."

"Mrs. Webster said the M.P.'s have instructions to pick up officers seen holding hands with indigenous personnel. That's a lovely phrase, isn't it?"

"I just don't give a damn, Mike. To hell with the M.P.'s and to hell with Mrs. Webster."

"I agree with you, Ace. But while I was talking with the general's main tank division her daughter came up

at girls a ravin' beauty. Why do you have to mess around with a Japanese actress if this Eileen is on tap?"

I put the beer down and stared at the floor. That was the question I had not wanted Mike to ask. I saw Eileen as I had known her at Vassar, bright, eager, a wonderful sport. I saw her that winter in Texas when her father was a colonel at San Antonio and I was at Randolph Field. Why hadn't I married her then? Why had she turned down the other young officers and insisted upon waiting for me? I felt like the announcer who asks the burning questions at the end of each radio program about breaking hearts, but I knew that you could turn my radio on the next day and still not get the answers.

I looked up at Mike and said, "I don't know."

He asked me directly, "Are you afraid of American women?"

I said, "I hadn't thought of it."

He said, "I've been over here a long time, what with one thing and another. I've watched lots of our men go for these Japanese girls . . . Hell, I won't be superior about it. I do myself. Frankly and all kidding aside, Ace, I'd a damned sight rather marry Fumiko-san than Eileen. But I just wondered why you felt that way?"

"I don't feel that way. At least if I do I don't know about it. But why do you?"

"With me it's very clear. One thing explains it all. You ever had your back scrubbed by a Japanese girl? Not a bath attendant mind you. That's simple. But a girl who really loved you?"

"What's back scrubbing got to do with it?"

"Ace, either you understand or you don't."

"What are you driving at?"

"I'm trying to say there are hundreds of ways for men and women to get along together. Some of the ways work in Turkey, some work in China. In America we've constructed our own ways. What I'm saying is that of them all I prefer the Japanese way." He laughed and saw that I

didn't entirely understand, so he banged his beer down and shouted, "All right! One easy question! Can you imagine Eileen Webster scrubbing your back?"

It was a crazy question, a truly hellish shot in the dark, but I could immediately visualize fat little Katsumi Kelly the other night, taking her sore and defeated husband into the bath and knocking the back of his neck and getting him his kimono and quietly reassuring him that her love was more important than whatever Lt.Col. Calhoun Craford had done to him, and I saw runty, sawed-off Joe Kelly coming back to life as a complete man and I had great fear—like Mike Bailey—that Eileen Webster would not be able or willing to do that for her man. Oh, she would be glad to storm in and fight it out with Lt.Col. Craford, or she would take a job and help me earn enough so that I could tell Lt.Col. Craford to go to hell, or she could do a million other capable things; but I did not think she could take a wounded man and make him whole, for my mother in thirty years of married life had never once, so far as I knew, done for my father the simple healing act that Katsumi Kelly had done for her man the other night.

Mike said it for me. He laughed and said, "There are all kinds of things wrong with Japan. But Japanese women aren't one of them and their view of love suits me fine." Then he added, "But I hate to see you be the one to take it all seriously. Because the Air Force would never let you marry a Japanese girl . . ."

"What would the Air Force have to do about it?"

"You'd see. You're one of their bright young men and they'd bring all sorts of pressures to bear . . ."

"Who's talking about marriage?"

Mike sighed. "That's better. They way you started, you were talking about marriage."

"I said I was confused."

"I'd be confused too if I was involved with two women like Eileen and Hana-ogi." He grew thoughtful and added, "It's very strange. I'd never have picked Hana-ogi."

She's always so mannish. Come to think of it, I've never seen her in girl's clothes. Have you?"

I thought of her rare charm and started to speak reverently but this scared Mike and he said, "Ace, I know damn well you're thinking about marriage and it's going to be tough. Son, it's going to be tough."

I insisted that I didn't know what I was thinking about, but my problem was solved for me in an unforeseen manner. Katsumi and Joe dropped by the air base the next afternoon and Katsumi took care of everything. Haltingly she said, "We have find house for you, Ace."

"A house!" I drew her toward a wall where no one could listen.

"Yes, one small house."

"What do I want with a house?"

"Where else you and Hana-ogi-san stay?"

"Wait a . . ."

"You not love Hana-ogi?"

"Sure I love her, but . . ." I appealed to Joe, who grinned and said, "When a Japanese girl loves you, Ace, it's solid. How you suppose I got my house?"

I said to them, "Hana-ogi could get into trouble . . ."

Katsumi looked at me incredulously and said, "When Hana-ogi come our house to see you it mean she love you. When she walk to Shinto shrine it mean same thing. Where you two make love? Here at Itami? I don't think so. (She pronounced it, "I don' sink so.") Officers Club Kobe? I don't think so. Takarazuka? No!"

I was about to call the whole affair off when Katsumi handed me a map showing that the house was not far from hers. Then she said, gravely, "Today Hana-ogi-san number one girl at Takarazuka. She work very hard for this. You be good man not tell anyone you love Hana-ogi. She make very dangerous come Osaka for you."

"If it's so dangerous . . ."

"But she tell me all time she work hard she think some day she meet . . ." Katsumi blushed and could not continue, so I waited until she gained courage, whereupon

she whispered, "Hana-ogi tall girl. Not little fat girl same me. Long time she dream she meet tall man—same you."

I must have shown my disappointment at being chosen because I was six-feet-two, so Katsumi said, "She meet many tall men but no one brave like you—no one brave to stand at bridge many times to see her." That was Katsumi's speech and as she left she said, "Hana-ogi come your new house tonight seven o'clock."

I was now overboard in the slipstream where things happen so fast you never get your parachute open. I was tumbling about and all thought of General Webster's orders, my promotion in service and my early ideas about the Japanese enemy were swirling in confusion. But of one thing I was determined. I would go to that house in Osaka early in the afternoon and I would clean it and I would stock the shelves with food and I would make it a home.

But at three-thirty I was called into an urgent meeting and it was nearly seven when I reached Osaka. I hurried up the main street to where my canal ran off to the right and I passed along the narrow footpath until I came to a little store, where I bought an armful of things to eat. Then I took a deep breath and walked out into the May twilight.

As I approached my house I saw that the sliding doors were open and from them came a bright light and a sight I shall never forget: a tiny cloud of dust followed by the merest flick of a broom. Hana-ogi had hurried to the new house to clean it for my arrival.

I dashed into the room, threw the food on the floor and took her in my arms. I kissed her wildly and pressed her golden cheek next to mine, but instead of the flood of kisses I anticipated she pushed me away, pointed to my shoes and cried, "Oh, Rroyd-san!" For a moment I was bewildered and then she knelt down and started to untie my offending shoes. Quickly I prevented her from doing this, so she picked up the food I had dropped and when she placed it on the shelf I saw that with her own money she had already stocked the kitchen.

There was a pot cooking over the brazier and I looked in, then turned quickly to find Hana-ogi cleaning my shoes and placing them in the corner. I took three steps, lifted her away from my shoes and carried her into the middle of the room, where I stood looking about me helplessly till Hana-ogi laughed and with her expressive head indicated a closet which I kicked open, releasing the bed roll. I spread it as well as I could with my feet and gently placed Hana-ogi upon it. She closed her slanted eyes for a moment, then looked up and smiled, pulling me down beside her.

In the days that followed I often recalled the stories I had read about American and English sailors who had fallen in love with island girls and of how idyllic it was. But these damnable stories invariably ended with the big kiss and it had not occurred to me that after the big kiss these island lovers must have had things they wanted to talk about. But how did they talk without any language? How in hell did they talk?

I do not think that those who have always stayed at home can understand how terrible a thing language is, how dependent we are upon it. During the tremendous weeks that followed when May flowers bloomed along our canal there were times when I almost tore at my throat trying to find some way to express an emotion to Hana-ogi. It's all right to gesture at a girl's eyes and indicate that they are lovely but if you feel your heart expand at the very sound of her quiet approach along the canal—if you feel the earth tremble at night when she brings your soft pillow to the bed roll while beside it she places her canvas pillow filled with rice bran—then you feel that you must speak to her or perish.

I knew exactly four Japanese phrases. *Ichī ban* meant *number one* and I used this interminably. When I first saw Hana-ogi undressed I gasped at her amazing beauty and cried, "Ichī ban!" When she cooked a good meal it was "Ichī ban." When she saw President Truman's picture in the paper I said, "America ichī ban." And once when she suggested that her breasts were too small I protested, "Ichī ban! Ichī ban!"

I also knew *Domo arigato gozaimasu*, which meant *thank you*. I used it all the time and it was curious how this phrase of courtesy came to mean so much to us. We

were deeply indebted to each other, for we had undertaken unusual risks, so there was an extra tenderness about all we did. When I spread the bed roll I would say, "Dom' arigato" but more often I used the full phrase. I was in a land of courtesy where great courtesy had been extended me.

Of course I knew the universal Japanese words *takusan* and *sukoshi* for *much* and *little*. Every American in Japan used these words as his final comment upon an infinity of subjects. The words look strange to me as I write them, for in Japanese the letter *u* is not pronounced in connection with *k* and it was *taksan* this and *skoshi* that just as it was *Ta-ka-raz-ka* and *skiyaki* rather than *sukiyaki*. I remember once when I was moved to great depths by something Hana-ogi had done and I pointed to my heart, put her golden hand above it and cried, "Takusan, takusan!" And I indicated that it was for her that it had become *takusan* after having been *sukoshi* for so many years.

And finally I knew that strangest of Japanese phrases, *Ah, so desu-ka!* It was usually abbreviated *Ah, so!* and meant exactly what it would mean in English. It was also shortened to *Soka*, *Soda*, and *Deska* and I used it for everything. Often I would hear Hana-ogi and Katsumi talking and one of them would be narrating something and the other would repeat over and over in the most mournful way, "Ah, so desu-ka! Ah, so desu-ka!" We all laughed hilariously when Joe found an American newspaper item in which a famous women journalist from New York said that even the Empress of Japan was becoming Americanized because she spoke a little English. "All the time I talked with the Empress she nodded her head and whenever she agreed with me she said clearly, 'Ah, so!'"

Hana-ogi, on her part, had acquired just about as much English. Like all Japanese girls her favorite phrase was *Never happen!* She could say this with the most ravishing wit and effectively kill any high-blown idea I might be trying to make, but once when I said that some day she

would see New York she said with great finality, "Never happen."

A second phrase she used a great deal was one she picked up from Katsumi and it too was common all over Japan: *I don't think so*. Hana-ogi had trouble with *th* and this phrase of classic doubt usually came out, "I don't sink so."

But if Hana-ogi had difficulty with *th*, her conflict with *l*'s and *v*'s and *f*'s was unending. She had acquired, from her Takarazuka shows, a few American phrases which she loved to use on me at unexpected moments, but they were so mangled because of the limited alphabet of sound in the Japanese tongue that I often had to think twice to detect her meaning. Once, at the end of a long night when we stayed up to clean our tiny house she caught me in her arms and cried, "Oh Rroyd, I rub you berry sweet." I was unprepared both for her emotion and her pronunciation and for one dreadful moment I almost laughed and then I looked down at her dear sweet slanted eyes and saw that they were filled with tears and we sat down on the tatami as morning broke and she told me in signs and kisses and strange half-words that she had never thought that she, Hana-ogi—dedicated to Takarazuka and knowing nothing else—would ever discover what it was to . . . She stopped and we had no words to finish the thought. Then she jumped up and cried, "wake you cawhee." And she took down the coffee pot.

It was true that not being able to talk made our physical love, there on the tatami mats, more powerful, but when that was past, when you lay there on the dark floor and heard feet along the canal path, you yearned desperately to talk of ordinary things, and once I thought of what Joe had said and I wished to God that I might be able to talk with Hana-ogi about the country club or the braces on junior's teeth or anything trivial at all—like the news that Katsumi-san was going to have a baby. I wanted to talk about that baby, what it would be like, would its eyes be Japanese, would it live well in America, but all I could do was to place my hand on Hana-ogi's

hard flat stomach and whisper, "Katsumi-san takusan—takusan." And she kept my hand there and said back, "Maybe some time Hana-ogi takusan" and we looked at each other and I think we both prayed that some day Hana-ogi would be takusan.

The matter of praying gave us some trouble, as it did Joe and Katsumi. Joe, being a good Catholic, was repelled when Katsumi established in their home a Shinto shrine, complete with symbols to be prayed to. There were some heated words and the shrine came down, but I don't think Hana-ogi would have agreed to surrendering her Shinto faith, for one day I came home and found that she had erected in our home three separate shrines: Shinto, Buddhist and Catholic. I tried to explain that I wasn't any of the three, but she said she was willing to be all of them for me. I asked her why she honored both Shinto and Buddhism and she said that many Japanese were both and that some were Christians as well, and she found nothing curious in tending the three shrines faithfully and I noticed that she paid just as fair attention to my one as she did to her two.

It became so imperative that we converse with each other that we looked forward with sheer delight to the visits of Joe and Katsumi and I was glad whenever Katsumi sneaked away from Joe's surveillance and came to our house to pray to her Shinto gods for her baby to be a boy and strong. Whenever she appeared Hana-ogi and I would unleash an accumulation of questions about the most trivial things. I would say, "Tell Hana-ogi I like more salt in all my vegetables." Imagine, I had been unable to convey that simple idea accurately. And Katsumi would reply, "Hana-ogi want know, you ever eat octopus?" and I would cry, "Is that what she was trying to ask?" and I would repeat the word *octopus* and Hana-ogi would tell me what it was in Japanese and thus we would possess one more word to share.

But the hoard of meanings grew so slowly that I used to look with envy upon the G.I.'s I saw who had mastered the language. Once buying groceries I met a tough Texas

boy with his Japanese girl and they were having an argument over some apples. Finally he asked in disgust, "Hey, whatsamatta you?"

The little Japanese girl caught her breath, grew trembling mad and slapped the Texas G.I. right across the face. Then, hands on hips, she demanded, "Whatsamatta you, you whatsamatta me? I whatsamatta you first!"

The G.I. laughed and picked up a box of candy, saying with a bow, "You my gal friendo ichi ban. I presento you." The little girl put her arm in his, cocked her head on one side and asked him if he thought her pretty: "Steky-ne?" He kissed her and cried, "You're steky-goddamned-ne, baby."

I envied the couple, for they had created a language of their own and it permitted them to convey their affection accurately. Like young children who refuse to be bothered by language, they ignored both Japanese and English and inhabited a delightful world of their own.

I returned with my purchases and asked, "Hana-ogi, what *steky-ne*?" She thought for a moment then put my finger on an especially attractive design on her kimono and said, "Steky-ne." I thought she was referring to the needlework and I pointed to another part of the kimono and asked, "Steky-ne?" but she shook her head.

I was perplexed, so she thought and took my finger and outlined her wonderful oval face, leaving my hand at her chin, asking, "You think—steky-ne?" And then I realized what the word meant and I kissed her warmly and whispered, "Steky-takusan-takusan-ne."

But as the days passed and as we fell more hopelessly in love we discovered that it was impossible to exist as passionately as we insisted without better communication of ideas, so I started to learn a little Japanese and Hana-ogi—who despised Americans and what they had done to Japan—reluctantly joined an English class. She bought a little conversation book which she studied each day on the train back and forth to Takarazuka and one night she volunteered her first complete sentence in English. Screwing up her courage like a schoolgirl reciting Milton, she

swallowed, smiled at me and declaimed, "Lo, the postilion has been struck by lightning."

The shock of these words was so great that I burst into uncontrolled laughter and I saw Hana-ogi slowly freeze with hatred. I had laughed at her best intentions. I too was an American.

I rose quickly from the floor to apologize, but when she saw me move toward her she ran away. Grabbing her English book she tore it to pieces and threw them at me. Those pages which fell at her feet she trampled upon and screamed in Japanese as she did so.

Finally I caught her hands and kissed her. I held her head to mine and when she started to sob I could have torn my tongue out. This cruel inability to speak was killing us and we were becoming lost people in a void of ideas . . . We were lovers who could not love and when Hana-ogi had sought to bridge this gap—humiliating herself and surrendering her hatred of the enemy—I had laughed at her.

I realized then that words must no longer be permitted to keep us apart. I lifted Hana-ogi to the bed roll and placing her beautiful legs toward the fire, I held her head close to my heart and burst into my own words, whether she could understand them or not. That night I said, "Hana-ogi, Hana-ogi! I love you with all the heart and mind within me. I've been a barren desert . . . I've been a man flying a lost plane far in the sky and I have never before known a human being. Now I've come to an alien land among people I once hated and I've met you and taken you away from these people and brought you to a tiny house and you have made a shred of heaven here. Hana-ogi, if I've hurt you through my ignorance you ought to lash me through the streets of Osaka, for my heart is in your care and if I were to hurt you I would be destroying myself. Whether you understand or not, these words are for you." And I kissed her.

I believe she comprehended what I said, for with her face now pressed to mine she spoke softly in Japanese and I think she unburdened herself of the accumulated

sions that had been tormenting her word-stricken heart. I closed my eyes and listened to the wonderful sound of her voice as she uttered the strange, angular syllables of her native language. She said one word which sounded like *hoshimashita* and I looked up and said it and she laughed and kissed my lips to keep them still while she completed her statement. She did not use one word I understood, but the meaning of her thoughts somehow seeped through and we knew that we were more deeply in love than ever before.

From that night on Hana-ogi and I talked with each other a great deal and we discovered that in love what is said is far less important to the person spoken to than the one who speaks. If I wanted to tell her that the days were growing longer and that I first noticed this during the year when I was a young boy on an Army base in Montana, I said just that, and it was marvelous for me, for then I remembered how I felt as a boy—the great cleanliness of life and the bigness—and I had a larger heart with which to love. And Hana-ogi spoke to me of her childhood and of how she dreamed of going to Tokyo and of how, when she got there, it seemed so much smaller than she had imagined. I understood only a little of what she intended, but one thing I understood with amazing clarity: when she had talked of these things for a long time she was lovelier than I had ever imagined a woman could be. In those long nights of talking, there in the bed roll on the tatami mats, I think we came closer to sharing with complete finality two human lives than will ever be possible for me again. Forbidden the use of words, we drove our hearts to understanding, and we understood.

In the morning after Hana-ogi tore up the English book I gathered the mutilated pages to burn them, but in doing so I noticed that her book had been published in 1879 by a brilliant Japanese scholar who had apparently been bowled over by English during those first wonderful days when Japan was opening her gates to Western learning. This gentleman's first sentence "for young ladies to use when starting a conversation in public" was Hana-ogi's

epic "Lo, the postillion has been struck by lightning," and although I am sure the ancient scholar never intended it so, that sentence became the gag line of an American-Japanese home. Whenever trouble appeared in any form Hana-ogi would declaim, "Lo, the postillion!"

I became intrigued by the book and smoothed out some of the other pages which yielded gems like "The port-manteau of my father is in the room of my mother." Hana-ogi asked me what this meant and I tried to explain, but the more I endeavored the sillier it all became until we were convulsed with laughter and I remember thinking, while Hana-ogi tickled me in the ribs, of the G.I. booklet on Japan which said: "The Japanese have no sense of humor."

But the phrase that quite captivated me was the very first one for use at a formal tea "where the participants are not well acquainted." The professor advised loosing this bombshell: "The camel is often called the ship of the desert." It seemed to me that this sentence was the essence of Japan: few Japanese had ever seen a camel and no one could care less what a camel was like than young ladies at tea, but the stubborn fact remained that the camel had sometimes been called the ship of the desert, so the sentence was judged to be just as good an opening salvo as any other. I tried to explain to Hana-ogi how ridiculous the whole thing was but she went to great pains to explain, with gestures, how the camel strides over the sand and seems to be a rolling ship and how the beast can go for many days without water and how there are two kinds of camels, one with one hump and the other with two. I tried to stop this flood of information, but she grabbed me by the hand and ran me down the alley to Katsumi's, where the two girls fairly exploded Japanese and Katsumi brought out her treasure chest and Hana-ogi ran through the magazines till she found one with her picture on the cover and on the inside were a half dozen pictures of her as a noble Arabian bandit in a desert extravaganza called *The Silver Sheik*. Then she commanded Kat-

s called the ship of the desert." I bit my lip and pointed at a picture of Hana-ogi in flowing robes and said, "Ichi ba chi ban," but Hana-ogi studied it and shook her head. Then she pointed to another and said, "Very nice," ("Berice," she called it) and this one showed her in better profile.

FIRST OFFICER'S WIFE: "American men buying underwear for Jap girls always look so pathetic."

From time to time during this long spring of the year I used to reconsider Mike Bailey's question: Did I love Hana-ogi because I was afraid of American women? At first the question had seemed ridiculous. True, I was afraid of the incessant domination of a mother-in-law like the general's wife, but I was certainly not afraid of Eileen, except when she imitated her mother, and so far as I knew I had never been afraid of American women in general. In fact, I had always liked them very much and so far as I can remember there was never a dance at the Point or at any of the Air Force bases that I didn't attend—and almost always with my own date. I decided that American women didn't scare me. But then came the problem of the weekies and I was never again so sure.

I had noticed that for some days Katsumi-san had been trying to speak with me alone and I guessed that she was hoping I might know some special way whereby she could get into the United States. Since I could give her no help I tried to avoid discussing the doleful question, but finally she caught me and asked, "Major, you my friendo ichi ban?"

"Yes."

"Then maybe you buy me weekies?"

"What are weekies?"

"You go P.X. Pleeze, Ace, I not able to buy weekies."

"Why not?" I demanded. "All wives get P.X. cards."

I remember that Katsumi held back, as if not wanting to report Joe's troubles, but under my questioning she said, "Colonel Craford not give me pass. Not give any Japanese wife pass. He hate us. He hate Joe for marrying Japanese."

This made me sore, so I started out for the big avenue

It would have been simpler, I suppose, if I had cut my throat right then. Certainly the stares couldn't have been any tougher or my confusion greater. But I walked as inconspicuously as I could to the lacy counter where, as I learned by prearrangement, the clerks waited on everybody else first. So as I stood there, trying to look at some indefinite spot on the wall but always hitting brassieres or girdles, I became aware of the conversation around me. It was intended for me to hear.

The first officer's wife said, "I suppose many of our men get trapped by these girls."

The second said, "I never see them fighting very hard to stay free."

The first replied, "I can understand enlisted men and Japanese girls. Probably never knew any decent girls in America." You could tell from the emphasis that unquestionably the speaker was decent.

The second agreed, "But what is impossible to understand is how an officer can degrade his uniform."

Fortunately a clerk appeared and I said, "I'd like some weekies."

The American wives broke into laughter and the clerk said, in the sing-song professional voice used by Japanese girls, "Small, medium or large?"

I gulped and asked, "What are weekies?" This caused a real flurry of laughter in which the Japanese girl joined.

She reached under the counter and produced an open carton containing a bunch of pink nylon panties. Grabbing one she dangled it in the air and asked, "Small, medium or large?"

Now more women gathered about the counter and there was an outburst of uncontrolled hilarity. I figured that nothing else could happen so I said, "I'll take the small one."

At this there was hysterical laughter and the Japanese girl popped her hand over her mouth for a moment, then showed me the band of the panty she was holding. "Major, weekies are one for every day of the week." And she showed me the embroidered word Thursday.

Frantically I indicated the entire pile and said, "I'll take them all."

But the clerk said, "These sample only. Small, medium or large?"

In despair I tried to think of how Katsumi looked. My mind was an aching blank and I pointed blindly at another Japanese clerk and said, "Her size, I guess."

Behind me one of the women whispered sweetly, "He doesn't remember how big she is!"

I looked around me at the faces of my countrywomen. They were hard and angular. They were the faces of women driven by outside forces. They looked like my successful and unhappy mother, or like powerful Mrs. Webster, or like the hurried, bereft faces you see on a city street anywhere in America at four-thirty any afternoon. They were efficient faces, faces well made up, faces showing determination, faces filled with a great unhappiness. They were the faces of women whose men had disappointed them. Possibly these harsh faces in the Osaka P.X. bore an unusual burden, for they were surrounded each day with cruel evidence that many American men preferred the softer, more human face of some Japanese girl like Katsumi Kelly.

As I paid the clerk I overheard the first officer's wife say, "All little Jap girls who live with G.I.'s are crazy for anything that will make them seem more American." The second turned to watch me go and added, "Including American men." But as I left these tough, bitter women and walked through their circle of bleak and unforgiving faces I saw near the elevator an American girl who could have been Eileen Webster. She was beautiful and fresh and perfect and I almost cried aloud with pain to think that something had happened in American life to drive men like Mike Bailey and me away from such delectable girls.

BUDDHIST MONK, 1794: "This bell we received as a gift from the girls of Yoshiwara."

Since I now knew that the secret of love is communication, I wish I could tell you exactly how Hana-ogi and I learned to talk in those exquisite days of early love, but I cannot recall how it was done. I do remember the evening when I tried to ask Hana-ogi what her name meant. I was barefooted and wearing the cheap blue-and-white kimono so common in Japan. I sat with my back against the fragile wall, my feet awkwardly out upon the tatami. I tried to convey the idea: "What does Hana-ogi mean?" but I did not succeed for the only two words she understood were *what* and her own name and she naturally suspected that I wanted to know what she wanted. So with tiny gestures and much pointing she indicated our small house of great love and said that all she wanted was to be here with me, that she wanted to hear me splashing in the tub, that she wanted to cook our meals over the glowing fire and that when she slid the paper doors shut in the evening she wanted to lock us in and the world out.

Quietly I sat against the wall and tucked my kimono tighter about me, relishing the delicate thoughts she had expressed for both of us. But then I tried again and this time she cried, "Ah, so desu-kal The other Hana-ogi! Yes, Rroyd-san. I tell."

It is here that I wish I could explain, but I can't. Knowing almost nothing of my language this extraordinary girl nevertheless told me the following story, while I scrunched against the wall, my knees against my chin. Some of the passages she danced, some of them she pantomimed, and some she spoke in such expressive Japanese that I could fairly guess their meaning. And this is the story she told me:

Once upon a time in a small village near Tokyo there was a girl of great beauty. No one knows her name, but she was to become Hana-ogi, the most renowned prostitute in the entire history of Japan. As a child she lived with her widowed mother but it soon became apparent that her only possible future lay in the green houses of Yoshiwara, the ancient walled quarter by the marshes of Tokyo, where the unwanted young girls of farmer families were trained to become glowing and cultivated courtesans.

The old mother sold Hana-ogi when the rare child was even, and for eight years this girl, always more beautiful, waited on the established courtesans of Ogi-ya, the green house which she would later make the most famous in all Japan. While she still wore her obi tied behind with its long ends signifying that she was virgin, the older girls taught her the skills of their trade and on her fifteenth birthday Hana-ogi discarded forever her real name, tied her obi in front, and took her first customer.

He was a young man from Odawara and he fell so desperately in love with Hana-ogi that he used to haunt the steps of Ogi-ya even when he had not the money to come inside. In perplexity he watched Hana-ogi become the most prized woman in Yoshiwara, and there were more than four thousand there at the time. She became famous for her poems, exquisite sighings of the heart and delicate memories of farm life when the early dew was on the ice fields. Priests in the temples sometimes told the worshippers of this saintly girl who took no thought of buying her own freedom from the green houses but who sent all her money home to her old mother. On holy days Hana-ogi went to a Buddhist temple that was known as the silent temple because it had no bell to record the great days and one evening Hana-ogi led a procession of thousands from the Yoshiwara bearing a bronze bell for this silent temple. It was her gift to the priests who were poorer than she.

Her fame became so great that visitors from China came to see this glory of Nihon. (My Hana-ogi rarely

called her country Japan, never Nippon.) Poets wrote famous songs about her. Men close to the Shogun came to talk with her, and above all the painters of the passing world, the wood-block artists who lived along the edge of the Yoshiwara, made many portraits of her. Today, in the museum at Kyoto, you can see maybe three dozen famous paintings of Hana-ogi. When I see them, said my Hana-ogi, I think that this immortal woman is speaking to me across the years and I take courage.

Now all the time that the great men of the Shogun's place and the world-famous painters were with Hana-ogi, the young lover from Odawara was watching, too, and one spring as the cherry blossoms were about to bloom he abducted Hana-ogi from the green houses. Here they hid themselves, these two happy people, no one knows. Whether they had children of their love no one can say. The years passed and bad luck fell on the use of Ogi-ya. No more did the rich men and the painters come there and no more did the priests of the nearby temples receive gifts from Hana-ogi. The portraits of this forgettable girl were sold in great quantity, for everyone wished some memento of the loveliest woman Japan had ever produced.

Then one day there was a burst of glory. (Here the real Hana-ogi, my living grace, assumed a kind of cathedral beauty as she simulated an incredible procession.) Hana-ogi had come back to the green houses. She was thirty-four years old, more beautiful than she had ever been, more stately. Young girls walked before her, bearing flowers. A minister of state walked proudly behind her. Two men held umbrellas over her head, and she was dressed in an exquisite blue kimono with rich flowing robes of purple and the geta upon her feet were eleven inches high. Within five days the greatest artists of Japan had issued magnificent pictures of her joyous return, and we can see them still, the stately processions, the rare, wonderful woman coming back to her strange world.

It was the golden age! In those days there was singing and long talks and beautiful pictures and fine women and

then foresee, but they were explained to me in part by an event which occurred three nights later. Like any husband and wife we ultimately felt even our perfect home confining and we wanted to go to a movie, but this was no easy trick. Hana-ogi knew that I might be arrested if I appeared on the streets with her and I knew that she would get into serious trouble if she were seen with me, so she left our paper doors first and in five minutes I followed and we met inside the darkened theater and held hands like any beginning lovers, congratulating ourselves on having evaded the chaperones. But our luck didn't hold because this movie concerned the French Foreign Legion attacking a desert outpost and across the screen lumbered a long convoy of camels and Hana-ogi whispered, "Ships of the desert!" and I fell to laughing so hard that finally she clapped her hand over my mouth and cried, "Royd-san. Somebody see us."

She was right. People did stare and two women recognized Hana-ogi as the great star at Takarazuka, so that when the lights went up these women choked the aisle and begged an autograph and soon Hana-ogi was surrounded by young girls.

We hurried out a side door and she fled alone down a back street and I ambled up the main street and when I got home I found her sitting dumb on the floor, her head bowed. She told me that she had always known that some time we would be found out and that she was not frightened. She would have to leave Takarazuka but she might find a job in pictures. Or there were certain theaters in Tokyo which might offer her work. She said, "I not scare. But Takarazuka I like very very much." (She said, "I like berry berry much.")

I suggested at once that perhaps she should leave me and return to Takarazuka dormitory and endanger no longer a brilliant career but she kept staring at the floor and said quietly words which meant this: "I always planned to act till I was past forty, for I shall grow old slowly, and when my days as an actress were over I intended to take the place of Teruko-san, who was the

greatest dancer Takarazuka ever had and who now teaches us the classical steps. But when I came here, Rroyd-san, I knew the danger I ran and if tomorrow were yesterday I would come here again."

I think that's what she intended to say and I was deeply troubled by the responsibility I had undertaken and by the resolve I had made never to desert her, but when she saw my silent fears she put her soft hand upon my face and said, "This time only time I be in love. I not stop our love one day before . . ." She made a great explosion with her hands as if the world had fallen in. She embraced me and we fell back upon the bed roll and I undressed her and her slim yellow body shone in the moonlight like a strand of gold that had fallen across my pillow, and she started to whimper and said, "I not speak true. Oh, Rroyd-san, I afraid. I not want to leave Takarazuka. I not want to sit by temple—begging—old woman—teeth broken away. But if I go you now, I never find cour: to come back. I never love nobody no more. Never, nev (She pronounced it, "I nebber rub nobody, nebb nebber.") I not want to be alone. I want to sleep he with you." Beside my head she placed her hard, t pillow stuffed with rice bran and we talked no more, we were finding, as so many people must, that the ways love are often terrifying when the day is done and c can no longer avoid studying the prospects of the futu

But next day she gave me proof of the courage she s she did not have. We were eating cold fish and rice wh our doors slid back and disclosed beautiful Fumiko's A curious change came over Hana-ogi and it seemed t she was no longer in our little house but back on t stage at Takarazuka and I appreciated how desperatel part of her that theater was. Fumiko had come, she sa to warn us. An Osaka newspaperman had seen us at i movies and had informed the Supervisor, who had r reprimanded Hana-ogi that afternoon because he ho she would come to her senses before he was forced to t official action. Fumiko-san implied that he had ask

her to speak with the brilliant star who had so much to lose if she persisted in her indiscretion.

Hana-ogi was deeply disturbed by this news and I became aware that these two girls had long ago formed a team of mutual protection and that they had always stood together as a team against the difficulties and defeats of their profession. Earlier Fumiko had found an American who had imperiled her career by kissing her in public and Hana-ogi had protested. Now it was Fumiko's turn to sound the warning. The two exquisite girls talked for a long time in Japanese and I judged they were assessing the various risks in the situation but Fumiko's arguments did not prevail and she left with tears in her eyes. When she had closed the doors Hana-ogi said simply, "I stay."

I discussed with her the possible results of this choice, even at times coming close to arguing on Fumiko's side, so that Hana-ogi stopped short, stood facing me, and demanded, "More better I go?" When I cried no and kissed her, she closed the discussion by saying, "I stay."

There was a firmness about her mouth when she said this and I was surprised, for I had come to look upon her as the radiant symbol of all that was best in the Japanese woman: the patient acceptor, the tender companion, the rich lover, but when Hana-ogi displayed her iron will I reflected that throughout the generations of Japanese women there had also been endlessly upon them this necessity to be firm, not to cry, not to show pain. They had to do a man's work, they had to bear cruel privations, yet they remained the most feminine women in the world. Now that I knew them, these strange Japanese women, I saw the contradiction everywhere. Katsumi was having a baby when she hadn't the slightest idea how it would be cared for or under what flag, yet it was she who bolstered up the spirits of her family. Hana-ogi had placed her career in jeopardy for a few months in a tiny house along a canal with a man who could never marry her. The young girls I saw with their American soldiers, the little women bent double carrying bricks and mortar to

the ninth story of a new building, the old women in rags who pulled plows better than horses, and the young wives with three children, one at breast, one strapped on the back, one toddling at her heels. I concluded that no man could comprehend women until he had known the women of Japan with their unbelievable combination of unremitting work, endless suffering and boundless warmth—just as I could never have known even the outlines of love had I not lived in a little house where I sometimes drew back the covers of my bed upon the floor to see there the slim golden body of the perpetual woman. I now understood why ten thousand American soldiers had braved the fury of their commanders and their country to marry such women. I understood why there were supposed to be many thousands of American-Japanese babies in the islands. I understood why perhaps a half million American men had wandered down the narrow alleys to find the little houses and the great love.

LT. COL. CALHOUN CRAFTORD: "You goddamned nigger-lover."

On this night I could not sleep. I was agitated by Hana-ogi's problem although as events turned out, I should have been concerned about my own. I was aware that I had found that one woman whose mere presence beside me in the dark night made me both complete and courageous. Toward four in the morning I hammered my pillow in confusion and Hana-ogi awakened and felt my forehead and said, "Rroyd-san, you sick!" And she leaped up from our bed and tended me as if I were a child and I hadn't the fortitude to tell her that I was in a trembling fever because her picture of an old woman huddling beside a Buddhist temple had made me nightmarish.

She cooled my head and wrapped dry sheets about us and I went to sleep assured that somehow we would escape from the inevitable consequences of our acts. But when I woke I was shivering again, not from fever but from outrage. For Lt.Col. Calhoun Craftord, a paunchy red-faced man who hated every human being in the world except certain Methodists from his corner of a hill county in Georgia, stood over our bed. His round florid face looked like a decaying pumpkin as he stared down at us.

"Well," he drawled infuriatingly. "You doin' mighty fine down there, Major." He kicked at the bed roll and Hana-ogi drew a sheet about her neck. Then Lt.Col. Craftord got purple in the face and shouted, "You get to hell up here, Major Gruver. The Giniral's gonna hear about this." He muscled his way about our tiny room, knocking things over, and I leaped from bed, but before I could do anything he threw my pants in my face and grunted, "Fine spectacle you are. A giniral's son, shackin' up with a nigger."

With an almost premonitory sense I recalled Joe Kelly's

violent threat one night when he had come home beat: "Some day I'll kill that fat bastard." I felt that if Lt.Col. Craford said one more thing in that room I'd beat Kelly to the job. I think the colonel sensed this, for he looked contemptuously at Hana-ogi huddled beneath the sheet and stalked through the paper doors. They trembled as he passed.

When Lt.Col. Craford showed me in to General Webster's office in Kobe the old man minced no words. "What in hell does this mean, Lloyd!" He was much more profane than I can repeat and he had all the details. "A fine, clean, upstanding man like you! The son of a general in the United States Army. Shacking up with some cheap . . ."

I stood there and took it. He never mentioned Eileen, but it was obvious that he was bawling me out on her behalf. She had been held up to public ridicule. His wife had been made to look silly. And I had outraged the military decencies.

He shouted, "Did you sign that paper we sent you acknowledging my order about public displays of affection with indigenous personnel?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you know what's in the order?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you defied the order?"

"No, sir."

He exploded. "What in hell do you mean, no sir?"

"I've never been guilty of public affection with a Japanese girl."

Lt.Col. Craford stepped forward and said, "One of my men saw them in the movies the other night. He followed them along the back streets. They were holding hands," he added contemptuously.

"You're a liar!" I shouted.

General Webster rapped on the desk. "You be still, Gruver. This is serious business. Now Craford, what actually happened?"

contact and he whispered, "Can't talk, Ace, I'll be over." He arrived around noon that morning and slumped into a chair, "Jeez, Ace, the fat's in the fire."

"What happened?"

"Old Blubber-gut sent a bunch of strong-arm boys to search your house. They photographed everything. I hope you didn't have any Air Force papers you shouldn't have. Anyway, they wrecked the joint and boarded it up for good."

"What happened to Hana-ogi?"

"The neighbors say she slipped out right after you were rested. Katsumi watched Blubber-gut's men tear up the house. Then she hurried out to Takarazuka with the guys but Hana-ogi never batted an eye."

"How can people take things so calmly?" I cried.

"You learn," Joe explained. "When you're a Japanese woman or an enlisted man, you learn."

It was that evening that my real torment began, for when the performance of *Swing Butterfly* ended I looked down from my prison and saw graceful Hana-ogi, moving like a goddess down the flower walk and across the Bitchi-ishi and through the vegetable stalls and onto the path that led to the dormitory and long after she had disappeared I could see the image of that slim and graceful girl disappearing into the shadows—and I became more determined than ever that I must not lose her.

On the third evening after my house arrest began, I was sitting before the dismal meal of Marine food brought to my room by the waiter, when Mike Bailey opened my door softly, cased the joint like a detective, then motioned down the hall. In men's clothes, looking like a would-be nitor, Hana-ogi slipped in to see me. Mike made a hasty sign of benediction and tiptoed out.

I cannot describe how joyous it was to see Hana-ogi in my room. Not only had I been tortured by my longing to have her beside me in the bed roll but—as I realized now—I was even more hungry to hear her soft voice chatting of the day's events and I believe my heart actually grew bigger as she told me of the little things: "Fumiko-

san say I crazy. When Colonel Craford smash house two kimonos rost."

"What do you mean, *rost*?"

"Men take. I no find."

I became so incensed over the lost kimonos that I realized that I had reached a new meaning of the word *love*. I was engaged in a heavenly contest with Hana-ogi to see which of us could give most to the other and this experience of surrendering my desires to another human being was new to me and frightening in its implications. I was already thinking vaguely about the future and a perplexing problem popped out as a blunt question: "Hana-ogi, how old are you?"

She counted thirty on her fingers and I felt as if a basket of icicles had been dumped over me, for a woman of thirty and a man twenty-eight seemed abnormal. I had known several officers married to women older than they and it always turned out badly. I was suddenly glum till I remembered that a Japanese girl is considered to be one year old at birth so we figured it out that Hana-ogi was really only twenty-nine and that furthermore during eight months of each year we would be the same age. It was extraordinary how much more beautiful she seemed at twenty-nine than she had been at thirty.

Toward morning she dressed and left my room, asking, "You have dinner tonight—Makino's?"

I explained what house arrest meant and said that I had pledged my honor as an officer. She said simply, "I have pledge my honor too. I have pledge the honor of my mother and the food of my two sisters." Then she kissed me and left.

So that night I put my honor way down in the bottom drawer among my socks and crept through the alleys to Makino's and as I climbed the stairs to the little room where I had first seen Hana-ogi my heart beat like the throbbing of an airplane engine and I thought, "God, that I should have become so involved," but when I got there Hana-ogi in green skirt and brown blouse was waiting for me. Old Makino made us tempura and to my surprise I

found I was getting to enjoy Japanese food. We talked of many things and Hana-ogi said that soon *Swing Butterfly* (she always call it *Butterfly*) would close in Takarazuka. Maybe it would go to Tokyo. The news was terrifying and I hadn't the courage to discuss what it might mean to us but she said, "I no go Tokyo. I stay here and wait for you."

It was incredible to me that she would give up Takarazuka and I said, "Hana-ogi, you can't."

Before she could reply Makino came running in and cried, "M.P.'s!" Ashamed of myself I crowded into a cupboard and heard the heavy tread of Lt.Col. Craford's polished boots and in that moment I understood what an ugly thing fear was and why we had fought the last war against the Germans: we were fighting the tread of heavy boots. And then like the wind on a stormy day I completely changed and felt disgusted with myself, an Air Force officer breaking my word, hiding in a closet with a Japanese girl who should have hated me. It was the low spot of my life and when Lt.Col. Craford stamped down the stairs I stepped out of the closet and said, "Hana-ogi, I've got to go back."

She looked at me closely and asked, "When M.P. come . . ." She pointed at the closet and asked, "You sorry?" She could not find the right word for *ashamed* but she did bring a blush to her cheeks and she did act out my shame.

"Yes," I said. "I gave my word." But as I turned to go a flood of terrible longing overtook me and I grasped her face in my hands and cried, "Don't go to Tokyo, Hana-ogi. Wait here. I cannot let you go."

Her slim, straight body grew limp and she whispered to me in Japanese, something which meant, "Not Takarazuka or my mother could take me away."

I kissed her hands as I had done that first night. There were a hundred things I wanted to say, but I was choked with confusion. I walked boldly down the stairs, marched openly along the street to the Marine Barracks. Hana-ogi, aware of the deep shame I had felt in the closet and

sharing it with me, marched just as brazenly before her distinctive Takarazuka costume and kissed me at the barracks. "Rroyd-san," she said softly, "you takusan much."

can officers might love those alien names and the curious creatures to whom they belonged. He shouted, "Ruin yourself over some common whore!"

I had taken a lot these last few days and I'd had enough. I hauled back my right fist and let my father have one below the left ear. He staggered back, got his footing and came at me, but General Webster separated us. We were all trembling and furious but Webster spoke first: "By God, you've struck a . . ."

"Get out of here, Webster," my father snapped. "I'll handle this."

Frightened and dismayed, General Webster retreated and while we watched him go, I had a moment to steel myself for the brawl I knew must follow. Four times in my father's career he had dragged colleagues into a boxing ring where in the anonymity of shorts he had massacred them. Before our fight began I thought in a flash of how strange it was that I had belted my father for saying far less than what Lt.Col. Craford had said and I experienced a dizzy sensation that when he turned back to face me I would see my enemy and my friend.

I shook the dizziness away and cocked my fists, but when he turned he was grinning and chomping his gum. "I take it she's not a prostitute," he laughed.

I started to say, "Sir, this girl . . ." but he interrupted me and pulled me into a chair beside him and asked, "Son, what's this all about?"

Again I started to explain but he said, "I flew out here from the Presidio to knock some sense into you. But you're not in the market for sense, are you?"

I said, "I don't want any lectures."

He laughed and chewed his gum and said, "Son, I wouldn't respect you if you hadn't swung on me. She seemed right pretty and you say she isn't a tramp?"

I told him who she was and he said, "By heavens, Mark Webster must have dropped his drawers when he heard about you having a home. He drove me in to see it. Say, they don't build very big houses in Japan, do they? Say, tell me how you proposed a home?"

I started to tell him about Katsumi and Joe but he said "Lord knows, son, I hoped you would marry Eileen Webster. Good family, staunch military background. Mother a bit of a bore but in service you can always get away from her. Say, have you heard the news that really galls Webster? His daughter's serious about a real-estate salesman from Seattle. Major, I think. Webster's furious and is rotating the fellow back to the States."

He sized me up carefully, chewing his gum, and said, "Y'know, son, if you still wanted Eileen you could have her. Wait a minute! Don't underestimate that kind of marriage. Right now you're all boiled up about sex, but a man lives a long life after that fire goes down. The you appreciate having a woman you can talk to, some one who knows military life. What do you and Madam Butterfly talk about?"

He waited for me to speak but as soon as I started said, "Let's get back to Eileen. You ever know any officers married to women who disliked the military? Sad lot, business. Your mother and I haven't been what you might call romantic lovers . . ." He slapped his leg and into real laughter. "Could you imagine your mother shack along a canal! But anyway we've always been to talk. We want the same things. We want the things for you, Lloyd."

He paused and I thought I was back in St. Louis on another occasion like this. My father was saying mother and I want the same things for you, Lloyd, even then I knew for a certainty that Mother had wanted those things for me and I had the strangest thought that if she were in Japan right now—if she were in the whole story—she would be on my side and not against me.

He said, "I suppose you've figured what your father's course would mean to things like life plans?"

"Well, getting married to a Japanese girl?"

"Married!"

"Sure, married." He chewed his gum real

said, "You mean you haven't thought about marriage. You mean you think you're the smartest guy on earth. Can shack up with a girl, have children even, and never think of marriage."

"I wasn't thinking of marriage," I said weakly.

"I know you weren't," he roared. From the other room General Webster stuck his head through the door and asked nervously, "Everything all right?"

"Get out of here," my father commanded, and I thought how rarely men like him could respect men like Webster or men like the one I seemed on the verge of becoming. "Squaw man," the Army would have called me in the old days. He walked up and down the room flexing his head muscles and then turned sharply, speaking in machine-gunlike tones.

lashing. It wasn't that we'd spoiled Della and Charley's wedding. It was that we'd spoiled her plans. I've always been afraid of Eileen since then."

"Afraid?"

"Well, sort of. After the ceremony the four of us who had gotten Harry drunk drove out to Randolph Field. Nobody said anything and we drove very fast and once when a Ford truck almost socked us one of the men said, 'That would be the second truck that mowed us down today,' and we all laughed and got drunk again and for the rest of that summer I never really seriously thought about marrying Eileen. Then Korea came along."

"But you have thought about marrying Madame Butterfly?"

"No," I said.

"A son doesn't bust his father, Lloyd, unless he's thinking pretty deeply about something. Look, son. Suppose you do marry this yellow girl. I'm on the selection board and your name comes up. I'd pass you by and if I wasn't on the board I'd advise the others to pass you by. We don't want officers with yellow wives. And where would you live in America? None of our friends will want you hanging around with a yellow wife. What about your children? You can't send half-Jap boys to the Point."

I thought it was very like my father to assume that all his grandchildren would be boys who would naturally attend the Point. I was going to say something about this, but he kept talking.

"Son, Mark Webster was blustering. I've talked him into forgetting your court-martial. When I was sore I asked him to cut orders sending you back to Korea. Even yet it's a great temptation for me to approve those orders and tell you to get back there and fight this thing out. But you've had Korea. Say, how are those Russian jets?"

I said they were good and he asked, "You think that Russian pilots man those planes?"

I said I thought so but we hadn't captured any.

"Those Russian are bastards," he said. "Real bastards."

I said, "We've been able to handle them for some time."

He banged the chair and said, "Son, don't take sex too seriously."

I said, "What should you take seriously?"

He said, "A whole life." He chewed his gum furiously and said, "A whole, well-rounded life."

I said, "Promotions and place in society and things like that?"

He looked at me quizzically and said, "You pulling my leg, son?"

I said, "Like the way you married a general's daughter?"

He said very calmly, "I ought to elout you. I just don't understand you sometimes. In ten years you'll be fighting the Japs again."

"Maybe. But I won't be fighting Hana-ogi."

"How can an officer get mixed up with a Japanese girl and take it seriously?"

I said, "Look, Pop. This gag worked once. This man-to-man . . ."

He looked half amused and asked, "What do you mean?"

I said, "Remember St. Leonard's when I thought I wanted to skip the Point and study English or something like that?"

"Long time ago, I'd forgotten."

"No you didn't, Pop. All the way out here from the Presidio you tried to remember what trick it was that convinced me then to do what you wanted me to do."

He blustered a moment and said, "Son, let's not obscure the facts. I'm here because you're my son and I'm very proud of you. Believe it or not I'm even proud that you had the guts to ignore Mark Webster's stupid order and find yourself a house in Osaka. But I don't want to see a decent American kid like you waste his life. Son, I've watched our men marry German girls and French girls and even Russian girls. Invariably, if you know the man, it's a sign of weakness. They're all panty-waists. Strong men have the guts to marry the girls who grew up next door. Such marriages finish with a divorce."

the nation strong. In your case and mine such marriages fit into military service. Leave it to the poets and painters and people who turn their back on America because they're afraid of it to go chasing after foreign girls."

He chomped his gum and said, much more slowly, "I ever tell you about Charley Scales? Resigned his commission and joined General Motors. Said he'd make a lot of money and he did. Some years later he came to proposition me about joining him. Lloyd, that was in '33 when the Army was the garbage can of democracy but I didn't even think twice. I've been tempted in my life but never by Charley Scales. Right now!" He snapped his fingers and said, "Who'd you rather be, Charley Scales or me?"

It was a childish trick but it had a great effect on me. In my mind's eye I could see Charley Scales, a big, happy man of some distinction in Detroit and the world. But to compare him with my father was ridiculous.

Father said, "You talk this over with your Madame Butterfly. You'll find she agrees with me."

I said, "I will."

He said, "By the way, where'd she learn English?"

I said she didn't speak English and he cried, "You mean I've learned Japanese?"

I said, "No."

He stopped chewing his gum and looked at me. "You mean—you have no common language? French, maybe?"

I said, "Well, you see . . ."

"You mean you can't talk together?"

"Well, on a really intricate problem she . . ." I was going to explain that she danced the words for me, but I felt that Father wouldn't understand. But he surprised

When he realized that we shared no language he became unusually gentle. I cannot recall his ever having been quite as he was at that moment. He put his arm about my shoulder and said reassuringly, "Son, you'll work this thing out."

He called for General Webster and said gruffly, "Mark,

I was wrong. I'm tearing up these orders for Korea. This kid doesn't need Korea. His problem is right here."

General Webster said, "That's what I told him and look how . . ."

"Mark, don't blow your top at this kid."

"Why not? Disobeying an order, breaking his word striking a superior . . ."

Father laughed and said, "Now you and I know, Mark that it was completely silly to issue such an order to a bunch of healthy young men surrounded by pretty girls. But that's beside the point. Don't get sore at Lloyd."

"Why not?"

"Because he's going to be your son-in-law."

"He's what?"

"He doesn't know it yet, and Eileen doesn't know it yet but if you want to do something constructive, keep real-estate salesmen away from your daughter. Because sooner or later she's going to be my daughter, too."

The two generals stamped out of the barracks and in three hours my father was on his way back to the Presidio.

WATANABE-SAN: "You pull this lever and the steel ball shoots up there and falls back down."

My Father thought that the tricks which had defeated me at a prep school would still work he was misled, for now I knew my mind. I had met a delectable woman, one whom I could love forever, and I simply wasn't worried about fathers and generals and Air Force rules. Here on this earth I had found Hana-ogi and by the time my father arrived back in California she and I had things worked out. We made a deal with Joe and Katsumi whereby we took one corner of their house and here we established a life as warm and loving as two human beings have ever known.

I would come home from the airfield to find Joe and Katsumi preparing the evening meal. They would tell me what had happened that day and I would exchange military gossip with Joe, but it would be a nervous time, for I would be watching the door and finally we would hear Hana-ogi's soft steps coming up the alley and Katsumi and Joe would slip away for a moment to gather wood or buy things at the store. The door would open and there would be Hana-ogi, a glimmer of perspiration on her soft golden cheeks. Like all Japanese she carried her books and bundles wrapped in a bright silk shawl tied cross cornered, and when I think of her at the sliding door of that little house I see her kick off her saddle shoes, drop the silken bundle, run her hand through her hair and hurry across the tatami to kiss me. At such times I would catch her in my arms, swing her into the air and drop her behind the screen that cut off our portion of the room. There she would swiftly slip off her Western clothes and slowly fold herself into a brocaded kimono. She was lovely; beyond words she was lovely.

But I must not imply that the warmth and wonder of that house came solely from Hana-ogi, beautiful and complete as she was, for I think that I have never seen a more satisfactory wife than Katsumi Kelly. She organized her house to perfection and kept it immaculate, even though Hana-ogi and I were apt to be careless. She could cook, she could sew, she could talk on many subjects and as her pregnancy advanced she gave promise of being an even finer mother than she was a wife.

Sometimes I used to watch her and I recalled with embarrassment that once in the consul's office I had almost refused to kiss her because she seemed so clodden and repugnant with her giggling and her big gold tooth. Now she seemed to me one of the most perfect women I had ever known, for she had obviously studied her man and had worked out every item of the day's work so that the end result would be a happy husband and a peaceful home. I asked Joe about this once and he said, "Ten years from now in America there'll be a club. Us fellows who married Japanese girls. Our password will be a suppressed giggle. Because we won't want them other lugs down the street to discover what gold mines we got."

I asked, "Are all Japanese wives as good as Katsumi?"

He said, "I admit I got somethin' special. But you don't hear the other boys kickin'." We wrapped our kimonos around our legs and sat back to enjoy one of the sweetest moments of the day. The girls were preparing supper and we listened to them talking Japanese. Katsumi spoke rapidly—the day's gossip, no doubt—and Hana-ogi, washing our rice, said over and over at least two dozen times, "Hail Hail" The phrase shot out of her mouth with such force it seemed to have come from the very bottom of her stomach, a cry of primeval terror. Actually it was merely the Japanese way of saying *yes*. But in addition to this machine-gun *hai* she kept nodding her head and chanting mournfully, "Ah, so desu-ka! Ah, so desu-ka!" To hear the girls in any trivial conversation would convince you that some sublime tragedy had overtaken us all.

Joe finally asked, "What are you sayin'?"

Katsumi looked up startled and explained, "I speak Hanako-san about a fish my father catch one day."

I started to laugh but Joe asked quietly, "Was it a big fish?"

"More big than this one," Katsumi said proudly. "Hanako-san say she never see such a fish." I liked Katsumi's name for Hana-ogi. Japanese girls often take their names from feminine or poetic words to which they generally add -ko or -yo. Thus at Takarazuka most girls had names like "Misty Snow" or "Spring Blossom" or Starry Night." And their names usually ended in -ko. For myself, I preferred the other form, Hanayo, and once Hana-ogi told me, "Hanako more Japanese but Hanayo more sweet."

The longer I lived with Joe Kelly, reared in an orphanage and rejected by his foster parents, the more astonished I was that he could adjust so perfectly to married life. He was a considerate husband, a happy clown around the house and the kind of relaxed and happy family man you see in the advertisements of the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Speaking of the *Post*, it helped me understand a little better what married life is. On May 30th the girls were all whispers and at dinner they sprang the big surprise! It was an American holiday, so they had pumpkin pie. Where they had finagled the pumpkin we never knew, but the pie was something out of this world, for they had used the pumpkin as you would apples or cherries and had baked it just as it came out of the can and it was really dreadful. I took one look at it and started to say, "What . . ." but Joe cut me short and tasted his piece.

"It's good," he said laconically.

The girls bit into their pieces and you could see them sort of look at each other as if to say, "Americans must be crazy. To eat something like this on holidays." We finished the disgusting dessert in silence and four days later Katsumi, leafing through an old copy of the *Post* saw a picture of real pumpkin pie. She waited till I got home and surreptitiously asked me if that was pumpkin

pie. I said yes and she asked me how it stayed so thick and so soft and I told her how you made pumpkin custard and she started to cry and when Joe came home she hugged him and kissed him and told him how ashamed she was and since Hana-ogi wasn't home yet I sat glumly in my corner and thought about the time I had laughed at Hana-ogi for her sentence, "Lo, the postillion has been struck by lightning," and I concluded that Joe's way was better and I wondered how a kid from an orphanage could understand a problem like that while I hadn't had the slightest glimmer.

However, I must not imply that all Japanese women are perfect wives. A trip along our alley would convince anyone that Japanese homes contained every problem to be found in American homes; plus some very special ones. In the narrow house next us lived the Shibatas. He was a minor business official who received practically no pay but had an enviable expense account from which he drew on most nights of the week for expensive geisha parties. He siphoned off part of the expense account to support one of the pretty young geishas on the side. It was rumored that he kept her in a second home near the center of Osaka and traditionally his wife should have accepted such an arrangement with philosophical indifference, but Mrs. Shibata was not traditional. She was modern and tried to stab her husband with a knife. At three in the morning when black-coated little Shibata-san came creeping home we could catch a moment of silence as the door to his house opened, followed by an explosion from his wife who used to chase him with a club. She was notoriously shrewish, and Katsumi and Hana-ogi apologized for her. "Japanese wife expected to understand men like geisha," they said.

Nor were most Japanese wives the patient silent creatures I had been told. When Sato-san, a railroad employee, took his wife shopping she trailed a respectful three feet behind him and never spoke a word unless spoken to by her immediate friends. But at home she was a tyrant and rebuked Sato-san contemptuously for

not earning more money. As I came to know the wives of Japan I had to conclude that they were exactly like the wives of America: some were gentle mothers, some were curtain dictators and some few were lucky charms who brought their men one good thing after another. I decided that which kind a man found for himself was pretty much a matter of chance, but whenever I looked at Hana-ogi I had an increasingly sure feeling that I had stumbled upon one of the real lucky charms.

Across the alley lived the widow Fukada and her twenty-year-old daughter Masako, who had had a G.I. baby without being married. Sometimes at night we could hear the grandmother screaming at Masako that she was a slut, and other women in the alley agreed. The American baby was not wanted and was not allowed to play with pure Japanese babies, and although everyone in the alley loved Joe Kelly and Katsumi and although they were proud to have a great Takarazuka actress living among them with her American flier, there was deep resentment against Masako Fukada, who had disgraced the blood of Japan.

Down the alley were the hilarious Watanabes. His wife was almost as broad as he was tall. They got along together fine except that Watanabe-san had a mistress even more compelling than a geisha: he was mad-crazy to play pachinko. He spent all his money at pachinko and all his spare hours at the pachinko parlor. When the police closed the parlor each night at eleven he would reluctantly come home and we would hear fat Mrs. Watanabe shouting derisively, "Here comes Pachinko-san! Dead broke!"

The pachinko parlor stood on the corner nearest the canal, an amazing single room lined with upright pinball games. For a few yen Watanabe-san would be handed seven steel balls, which he would shoot up to the top of the pinball machine and watch agonizingly as they fell down to the bottom, almost always missing the hole which paid the big prizes. The pachinko parlor on our alley was filled from morning till night and everyone was

bitten by the pachinko bug, including Hana-ogi and me, and it was a curious fact that my friendship with the pachinko players in that crowded parlor would later save my life.

Across the alley from the pachinko room was the flower shop. You would have thought there could not be in that entire alley one rusty yen for flowers, but almost everyone who lived along our narrow gutters stopped into the flower shop for some solitary spray of blooms which was carried reverently home for the alcove where the gods lived. I cannot recall a moment when there were not flowers in our alcove and I—who had never known a violet from a daisy—came to love them.

The next shop is difficult to describe. In fact, it is impossible because in all the rest of the world there are no hops quite like these in Japan. It was a sex shop where husbands and wives could purchase tricky devices with which to overcome nature's mistakes and short changings. To satisfy our curiosity Katsumi-san took Joe and me there one day. The shy owner listened as we laughed at his amazing collection of sex machines. Then he said in Japanese, "Go ahead, laugh. Young Japanese men laugh, too. But when they're married and reach forty they come to me for help." Katsumi translated and then broke into an uncontrolled giggle. I asked her what she had said and she explained, "I tell him Joe no need help." The shy owner smiled nervously and replied, "At twenty nobody needs help."

But the true wonders of our alley were the children. I could neither count them nor forget them. They had round faces, very red cheeks, straight black bangs, fat little legs and boundless joy. I don't think I ever heard a Japanese child cry. Certainly I never saw one struck and I came to believe that the most delectable children I had ever seen were these noisy, hilarious children. Whenever they crowded around me as I came up the alley I loved Hana-ogi more.

Each house in our alley was desperately packed, so that one tiny room af-

sized American home and these teeming masses of people lived and worked and had babies and argued politics just like all people across the world. But there was this difference. Not a shred of anything was wasted, not even the human manure which was so patiently gathered each morning and from which sprang the flowers and the food. I recall certain evenings that spring when I entered this narrow alley at close of day and the front of every house would be open and dozens of children would run, black-bobbed, to greet me and from every open room facing the alley and the people of Japan would speak with me and I shared a warmth and goodness that I had never known in Lancaster or the camps where I grew up. I was one of the people—one of the millions of people who cling to whatever shred of hope and property they can grab hold of, and from this alley with the myriad children and the brawling and the flowers and the unwanted American-Japanese baby and the pachinko games and the sake drinking I borrowed a strength I had never had before.

CONSULAR REPORT: "Eskivan,
Peter. Mother says, 'No damned
good.' "

It expressed itself in an unforeseen way. I was in my office at Itami Air Base when a sergeant appeared to tell me that Lt.Col. Calhoun Craford was outside. The florid colonel stepped in and got right down to business. "You think you're smart" (he said it: *Yawll thank yore smaht*) "gettin' a four-star giniral to come out and save your neck. You accustomed to hidin' behind your pappy's back?" Then he let me have it. "My men been trailin' you, Gruver. We know you and that tramp are holed up in enlisted man's quarters. But we can't touch you because of your pappy. So we're doin' something better. We're sendin' Joe Kelly back to the States."

"But what'll happen to Katsumi?"

The fat colonel looked at me with disgust. "Who's Kats-what's-his-name?"

"Kelly's wife."

"The Jap girl. Not up to us to worry what happens to her."

"You're not breaking up this family?"

"Don't call it a family. The girl's a cheap Jap tramp."

I said that Katsumi was a decent girl, that she was studying to become a Catholic, like her husband, but apparently Lt.Col. Craford hated Catholics worse than he hated colored people, for he said, "And when we finish with Kelly we'll figure out some way to handle you. Father or no father."

He left me and I sat for a long time staring at my desk, contemplating the mess I had made of things. I had proved myself a shoddy officer. I had loused up the life of an enlisted man. I had made Eileen look ridiculous and I hadn't done much better with Hana-ogi. Then I began to weigh what I had accomplished in Japan and

things looked brighter. I had come to know what a home meant, an unpretentious home where love was. I had found a beautiful girl filled with tenderness and grace and wit. I had learned at last to share my heart with another human being. And most of all I had discovered the tremendous passion of turning down the bed roll at night and seeing the slim, perfect body of Hana-ogi. I jumped up and cried, "Gruver-san, if you lose that girl you're nuts. Marry her, stupid. Marry her."

But as soon as I had said the words I began to sweat and I remembered all the predictions my father had made that night in the Marine Barracks. My career gone, my wings and their promise lost, my place in my American world vanished and I with an Asiatic wife. It was then that my new-found courage asserted itself.

I recognized the trick my father had played on me. He had planted those poisonous seeds so that they could flourish at just such a moment, and I decided that it was against such tricks that I was revolting. I did not want to become a general like my father, with his cold cut-offness from the world. I didn't want to be a second General Webster, ruled by Eileen. And I certainly didn't ever want to become a Lt.Col. Craford. I wanted to be one man, standing by myself, sharing whatever world I could make with the woman who had helped me to discover that world. In my moment of resolution and light I knew that I would never waver from my purpose. I was going to marry Hana-ogi.

I called Joe Kelly and asked him to meet me at a tiny bar we knew in Osaka where M.P.'s never came. It's impossible to describe such Japanese bars to Americans. How can you explain a bar so small that it has space for only four customers and two hostesses?

"Joe," I said in greeting, "can you keep a secret?"

"Sure, Ace."

"I mean two secrets. Big ones?"

"Hanako havin' a baby?"

"Joe, Blubber-gut is laying for you. He's going to ship you home first chance he gets."

"That's no secret. He threatened me openly two days ago. I didn't tell anybody. Didn't want to worry you. But he shouted, 'All you nigger-lovers are goin' home. You're on.'"

"Joe, I want you to promise me you won't do anything stupid."

"Me? I should be stupid like him?"

"Look. One night I heard you tell Katsumi you were going to shoot Blubber-gut."

"Me? I'm no rod man. What's your other secret?"

I ordered another beer and took a big gulp. "Exactly what papers do you have to sign to marry a Japanese girl?"

Joe whistled and said, "Look, Ace. This ain't for you. Suppose Hanako is beggin' you to marry her! It ain't for you."

"Joe, don't jump to conclusions. I haven't told her yet. But so help me God, I'm going to marry that girl. What are the steps?" He repeated his earlier warning and I asked, "You mean you're sorry you married Katsumi?"

A big grin broke on Joe's face and he said, "One night I told you that bein' married to that Buddha-head was livin'. It ain't. It's somethin' much finer than livin'. It's like you was dead and all the stress and strain was over and all that was left was the very best—and it's the best because it's all wrapped up in her. It ain't livin', Ace. I used to live in Chicago. This is way beyond that."

I sat with my hands over my face and didn't look up for a moment. Then I said, "I feel exactly that way about Hanayo."

Joe ignored this and said, "Ace, I don't believe you could take the bad time they give you."

"What do you mean?"

"They wear you down. Enlisted men get used to bein' worn down but you ain't had the experience of diggin' your heels in real stubborn and resistin'."

"How do you mean?"

"They give you so many papers. The chaplain prays over you. And everything they do they do with crazy

smiles, like you was off your rocker and only they could save you. And what's worse, they ask the girl so many heart-burnin' questions. Hana-ogi won't tell you but some night when you kiss her she'll break down and cry for an hour. I don't think you could take it."

I said, "Tomorrow morning I'm starting the paper work."

He said, "Ace, you're a big man. It would make them look silly to lose you to a Japanese girl. So they'll hit you with big stuff."

"I'm ready."

"Ace, they'll hit you with generals and admirals and men who knew your father. The only way you can swing it is to get the help of your Congressman. Who is he?"

"I don't know."

"Where do you live?"

"I don't have . . ."

"Well, where do you vote?"

"I've never voted." For the first time I realized that I was completely a military man. The Air Force was my home. I cast my vote with the talking end of an F-86.

Joe studied this and said, "Don't worry. Practically any Congressman would love to fight your battle. You want me to take it up with Shimmark? He loves to get his name in the paper."

I thanked Joe and said I'd work it out somehow, but that very night they started to throw the big reasons at me, even before I had told Hana-ogi that I was going to give up the Air Force and marry her. It happened a long way off, in Texas, for that night I heard a radio program explaining why the Democrats of Texas were going to support Dwight Eisenhower for President. I had known the general at several different bases and had played with his son. Suddenly, there in the dark streets of Osaka, Eisenhower became the symbol of what a major in the Air Force might become: a man ready for many different kinds of action if his country needed him. For one hellish hour I walked the streets weighing what I was doing and then I found myself at the entrance to my

alley, and skinny Watanabe-san had struck it rich at pachinko and ran out in the street to offer me a beer and I got a rosy glow on, and about eleven Hana-ogi came down to take me home, but I did not tell her then of the great decision I had made.

In the morning I sneaked into Kobe, for I did not want either General Webster or Lt.Col. Craford to see me, and I went to the American consulate. Luck was with me, for Mr. Carstairs, the fuddy consul, was not yet in and I could talk privately with his secretary, the horse-faced girl who had married a G.I.

She recognized me at once and said, "You made my brother the hero of his whole block."

"How do you mean?"

"Your autograph. The kids take Korea seriously, even townups don't."

Although she said this with a smile I noticed that she was eyeing me suspiciously and after I had made a few awkward starts at conversation she put her two hands flatly on her desk and said, "Major Gruver, did you come here to find out about marrying a Japanese girl?"

I gulped and must have blushed, for she added immediately, "I can spot you guys a mile off. What are you ashamed of?"

I asked her what she meant by that and she laughed. "You all think there's some tricky way to get around the tape. And you're all ashamed to speak to your superior officers." She looked up at me with such infectious amusement that I had to laugh, whereupon she said, "But you, Major Gruver. I never thought you'd tumble for a Buddha-head."

I fumbled a bit and asked, "Just what are the paper requirements?"

"I can't tell you a thing, Major."

"You work here."

"Forbidden. You military heroes have to clear everything through your chain of command."

"You mean it's as tough as that?"

"It's tougher, Major. We don't want men like you

marrying Japanese girls. We make it extra tough for men like you."

"I was only asking," I said.

"Sure! There hasn't ever been a soldier in here who really intended to get married. They were all only asking!"

"Then you won't help?"

The big girl looked out the door to see if Mr. Carstair had arrived yet. Satisfying herself on that point she said "Old Droopy Drawers lives by the book. He'd fire n if he saw me talking with you about legal matters. But I figure if a man can shoot down seven MIG's he's entitled to some help."

She showed me a completed file on a sailor who had married a Japanese girl. I had heard of the paper work. I had even seen some of it during Joe Kelly's marriage. But I had not comprehended how repetitious and degrading it was. I began to understand what Joe meant when he said that only an enlisted man, conditioned standing in line and taking guff, could see a Japanese wedding through.

I said, "Isn't this a pretty tough obstacle course?"

The girl laughed and said, "If I had my way, we'd make it tougher. Men like you oughtn't to grab Jap girls just because they're available."

"I don't want a lecture," I protested.

"Look, Major. I'm your big sister. Remember? We just made a study of which Americans were marrying Japanese girls. The findings aren't pleasant." She riffled some papers and read off the dismal case histories: "Wyskanski Noel. Orphaned. No education. Had a fist fight with the Catholic priest. Reform school." "Merchant, Nicholas. Ran away from home. Been in guard house regularly since being drafted. Two court-martials. Threatened the Japanese social worker who proved that the first girl he wanted to marry was a notorious prostitute." "Kelly, Joe. Your friend. Worst record in the Air Force in Korea. Constant discipline problem. Accused of murdering a drunk in Chicago but case thrown out of court on technicality."

Always on the verge of criminal prosecution. Recommended twice for dismissal from the Air Force." She tossed Kelly's paper aside and asked bluntly, "How'd you get mixed up with a dead-end mutt like him?"

"He was in my unit."

"Did you meet your Japanese girl through Kelly?" I hesitated a moment trying to frame an answer but the smart girl understood. She put aside the file and said patiently, "Major Gruver, you're simply not the type. These men—these perpetual failures . . ." She hammered the file and turned away to blow her nose. At that moment the front door opened and in came prim Mr. Carstairs. In one instantaneous glance he saw me and the marriage file and his secretary wiping her eyes. He stepped precisely into the middle of the doorway and said, "My goodness, Major Gruver isn't thinking of getting married to a Japanese girl, is he?"

The secretary looked up and sniffed. "Yes, damn it all, he is. And I've been telling him he's a complete fool."

"You are," Mr. Carstairs said. He passed through our room and said sharply as he left, "But there's nothing to worry about. The Air Force wouldn't let such a stupid thing happen."

When he was gone the secretary asked, "Has your Jap girl started her part of the paper work?"

I said, "Well . . . I haven't . . ."

With great relief the big girl started to laugh. "I understand! You haven't asked her, have you? Thank God!"

I blushed and said, "Look, we're getting married."

She ignored this and said, "I feel so much better. Ace, dozens of you men come in here to ask about getting married. But most of you haven't proposed yet. Then I breathe easy because everything is all right."

"You have some special way of stopping it?"

"No," she said surprised. "It's just that first-class Japanese girls won't marry American men. They prefer Japan. Act, believe me, it's ten-to-one that the girl you deserve won't marry you, and the kind you can get, you wouldn't want."

I looked at the shabby office and at the pile of marriage reports. Grimly I said, "You can start a new file. 'Gruver, Lloyd. Well educated. Never in trouble. Best man the Air Force had in Korea. Clean-cut American type. Married a Japanese girl because he loved her.' Show it to your Mr. Carstairs every day."

In real anger I went over to the village of Takarazuka, where I waited in a vegetable stall near the Bitchi-bashi and toward noon I saw the first Takarazuka girls go by in their swaying green skirts. Then Fumiko-san passed me and I hid in the back of the store until she had disappeared. Finally I saw Hana-ogi approaching and I had that rare experience that a man sometimes knows when he sees the girl he loves picking her way along a crowded lane unaware that he is watching, and at such times—when the girls are not on their good behavior, you might say—they are extraordinarily lovely and ratify doubly all thoughts and decisions of preceding days. Hana-ogi was like that. She wore a gray kimono flecked with silver and gold, and it encased her lovingly, and her feet in light gray zori threaded an intricate pattern through the crowds of noonday shoppers, and as she drew near my vegetable stall I was fluttering like a broken propeller but at last I knew what I wanted. I reached out, grabbed her arm, and drew her in beside me. The man who

short hair grew down in sideburns. She looked at me for a moment and tears came into her dark eyes.

"We no speak of marriage, Rroyd-san. No. No."

"I know it's a surprise," I said. "But I've thought it all out and I'm willing to give up the Air Force and find some other job."

"But Rroyd, I no go America."

"We'll work that out, too," I said. "Some time they'll change this crazy law so a man can take his wife home."

"You no understand, Rroyd-san. I no want to go."

I stepped away from the giant radishes and stared at Hana-ogi. It was incomprehensible to me that any Japanese girl, living in that cramped little land with no conveniences and no future, would refuse America. What was it the officer's wife in the Osaka P.X. had said: "The damned little Jap girls lay in wait at street corners with lassos and rope the American soldiers in." I said, "I'll explain it all to you tonight."

But she replied most strangely, "Some day you leave Japan, Rroyd-san. Before you go I like you see pictures of real Hana-ogi. In Kyoto."

"I don't want to see any pictures!" I cried. "Damn it, I came here to tell you we're getting married."

"You get auto tomorrow morning—early." She moved quickly toward the door of the shop, then turned to kiss me passionately on the lips. "When you go back America," she said, "I want you remember great beauty of Hana-ogi."

THE CURATOR: "It is unlikely that even one foreigner in all our history has truly understood Japan."

Early next morning we left Osaka in Lt. Bailey's Chevrollet and drove along the side of a river which for untold centuries had carried water to the rice fields of this region. Just far below the level of the road, hemmed in by strong dikes built many generations ago and upon all the land there was the mark of much toil and the footprints of many people. Wherever we looked women were at work piling and lifting.

Our entrance to Kyoto was memorable, for we saw in the distance the soaring towers of great Buddhist temples, their tiers built with corners upswept in the Chinese style. As we drove along one street we caught a glimpse of the famous Fushimi Inari Shinto shrine, a glorious vermilion thing with enormous blood-red torii guarding it.

But today we were not interested in shrines or temples. We went along a side street burdened with age-old pines. Just underneath a canopy of evergreen we stopped to enter a museum. It was built like a temple, with nearly a hundred statues of stone and wood, as if the old heroes of Japan had gathered to greet us, frozen forever in their stiff ceremonial attitudes. The curator hurried up to us when he learned that I could speak no Japanese. He summoned a striking young man. He was in his thirties, well educated, and wore heavy glasses. He had excellent teeth, a frank smile and a rare command of English.

"I studied at Oxford," he explained, "and served for some years in our store on Fifth Avenue and for two years in our store in Boston. What did you wish to see?" It was clear that he did not know Hana-ogi and that he supposed her to be merely some attractive street girl whom he had picked up for the day. He was therefore somewhat embarrassed when she spoke to him in Japanese, so I in-

interrupted and said, "I understand you have an unusual collection of prints of Hana-ogi, of Ogi-ya."

Immediately he withdrew deep inside himself and studied me carefully. Then he looked at Hana-ogi and bowed very low. "You are Hana-ogi-san of Takarazuka," he said in precise English. "You are very beautiful. And you, Major, are Lloyd Gruver. Yes, yes. Even in Kyoto we have heard of you." I did not know whether he meant that he had heard of me as a flier or that he had heard of Hana-ogi and me, but he nodded formally and said, "I can truly appreciate your desire to see the famous prints of the other Hana-ogi."

He led us upstairs, past the frowning Japanese heroes, and I felt that I was in hostile land. In this strange building I at last got the feeling of being an invader, surrounded by an alien religion and a strange art many centuries older than my own native land. I experienced the feeling even more deeply when I sat on the floor in front of an easel while the young curator went to a locked cabinet. Hana-ogi must have sensed my uneasy thoughts, for she put her hand in mine and whispered, "Now you see greatest beauty."

I was totally unprepared for what I saw. I had developed a mental impression of the ancient Hana-ogi. She must have looked, I thought, something like my Hana-ogi: extraordinarily beautiful, yet with a distinctive oriental cast. I believed the pictures of her would look something like Botticellis.

I shall never forget the extreme shock of that first print. The young curator held it from me for a moment and said in reverence, "The first one is of Hana-ogi as a young girl, just come to Ogi-ya. It is by one of our finest artists, Shuncho." Then, bursting with pride and affection, he displayed the picture.

It was disgusting. The girl's face was pasty and flat. Her hair was a mass of yellow combs. She was swathed in seven kimonos that gaped at the neck. But worst of all, her eyes were caricatures, mere slants, and her teeth

a horrid black. In this portrait of dead beauty I could not find one shred of loveliness.

I must have betrayed my disappointment for both Hana-ogi and the curator tried to explain that the design was controlled by Japanese artistic tradition, the way a portrait of a woman by Picasso does not appear really beautiful. I remember trying real hard to remember who Picasso was, but before I could get it they took away the first picture and brought in another by an artist whose name I didn't catch, but my dismay was greater than before. The famous courtesan had the same pasty face, slit eyes and funereal teeth, but this time her head was twisted into such an angle that I remember thinking, "If she doesn't straighten up she'll strangle." In her left hand she held one of the endless combs which she was jabbing into her mass of oily hair, and in her right she grasped a black ebony fan which made the whole picture look stupid. Even the half dozen kimonos were poorly painted and in odd colors.

It was the third picture which caused the argument. I took down the name of the artist, Masayoshi, for he showed Hana-ogi returning to the House of Ogi-ya after her elopement. She was dressed in many kimonos covered by a purple robe and followed by two barefoot servants carrying an umbrella and a massive bouquet of flowers. I studied the picture with dismay, for I recognized it immediately as one that Hana-ogi had described for me that night when she danced the story of her predecessor, but what she had not told me was that this picture of Hana-ogi showed a remarkably ugly woman with a big nose, dirt smears over her eyebrows and paunchy cheeks. "Why she's ugly!" I cried. I felt defrauded.

My Hana-ogi withdrew as if she had been struck and the young man pulled the print away. "I am afraid," he said in clipped syllables, "that you have no appreciation of our art."

"I was told that this Hana-ogi was the most beautiful woman in Japanese history."

"She was," the young man insisted.

"But these pictures . . ."

"It's our style of art," he explained.

"But look at Hana-ogi-san here. This one. She's really beautiful."

The young man did not look at Hana-ogi-san. Instead he took the portrait of the ancient Hana-ogi back to the cabinet and returned with another. Quietly he said, "I am afraid you are blind to the problem, Major. But would you like me to explain in a few words?"

"Indeed I would," I said.

"You'll forgive me if they're very simple words?"

"I will. I've heard so much of this Hana-ogi I don't want to go home disappointed."

"If you have a free mind," he assured me, "you will go home elated. The picture I'm about to show you is by one of Japan's supreme artists, Utamaro. Have you heard of him?"

"No."

"No bother, but will you believe me when I say his work is prized all over the world? Good. You are going to see one of his loveliest creations. When you look at it don't think of Hana-ogi. Think only of this heavenly yellow."

He flashed the picture before me and the yellow was indeed like a fine sunlight. He continued his narration, pointing out the perfect proportions of the design, the exquisite line, the subdued color harmonies and the suggested textures. I followed him carefully and agreed with what he said. Then brusquely he said, "As for the face of Hana-ogi, we Japanese think it was sent down from heaven."

The intensity of his comment caught me unawares and from some distant corner of my brain came the affirmation, "The men who knew this woman thought she was beautiful." And immediately there came another terrible memory—of a time when some of us young officers were attending a wedding and we saw the bride and there was a moment of awful silence and somebody behind me whispered, "Well, every man thinks the girl he's marrying is pretty." And I could not help but think of Hana-ogi.

to introduce my Hana-ogi to strangers who had never known her and I could feel them cringing away from my Japanese girl—unlovely to them—as I now cringed away from the long-dead Hana-ogi. I looked again at the treasured face, at the curious slanted eyes and the black teeth and from my own humility and the vanished green houses of the Yoshiwara came the assurance that she was beautiful. I said, "I think I understand."

The young man started to take the Utamaro away but "Let me study it some more." I pointed to the coloring in the upper corner and asked what it was. The remarkable discussion that followed the curator stood crisply at attention with his left hand on the easel. I have only to close my eyes to see him standing there with his faded echo of the great Hana-ogi. Impossible to say what this printing means, Major. The poem, written by some unimportant man who knew the Hana-ogi. These symbols are his name: The mark on the other side of Yanagiwara. That's all we know of him, a stranger who came from a distant village and saw the great woman once. But his poem will live with us forever."

"What did he write?"

"I'm sorry but I cannot tell you the meaning."

"You can't translate the symbols?"

"Yes," he assured me proudly. "I was translator to the Foreign Office during the peace treaty at San Francisco. But the Japanese language like Japanese beauty and Japanese life can never be truly translated. For example, the name Hana-ogi means *flower* and *fan*, and its symbols are woven into the poem, but what they are intended to mean in this particular poem no one can say. The stranger from Yanagiwara himself did not know."

"What do you mean, he didn't know?"

"In Japan a man sees a beautiful woman and he expresses words, but they have no specific meaning."

"How can words have no specific meaning? There's the problem. Right there. Why can't you read it?"

"I can, but I can, Major. Trouble is, I can read it in so

for whom Hana-ogi now felt responsible. For a few minutes after leaving the museum I had feared that knowing my Hana-ogi's history might make it impossible for me to marry her, but one mention of her father ended such doubts, for I recalled the old Japanese farmer we had watched on that first night we had slept together. That was poverty, when a man sifted each grain of soil by hand to make it yield a little more rice. I knew that if Hana-ogi's father had sold her it was because he had no human alternative. I said with new dedication, "Now we'll get married," but she merely drew closer to me and I believe that she had taken me to Kyoto so that I might know of her childhood and that if the curator had not told

TRANSLATION: "These women" at
the girls' school they had been to
show me the dormitory, and the

This gentle mask-faced Japanese woman came to the Marine Barracks in Takarazuka accompanied by a small young woman who spoke good English and they explained that they wished me to accompany them on a matter of greatest importance. I followed them to the Bitchi-bashi, then through the vegetable stalls and onto the footpath leading to the girls' dormitories.

This was the first time I had been on this path and as I approached the building where Hann-ogi had lived before she met me I grew quite excited but then I saw the dormitory itself and it was forbidding: a plain wooden building covered with bamboo matting and protected by a row of cryptomeria trees planted to make a high hedge. The house was like a fortress and I was pleased at the prospect of invading it.

But my guide didn't stop there. Instead, she led me down a narrow path past the cryptomeria trees and up to a small hill that overlooked the river. There she stopped at a curious gate that looked like the miniature entrance to a temple and after opening this she took me into a beautiful garden which surrounded a superior Japanese house made of highly polished wood. It was guarded by an enormous flat stone upon which sat nine young girls wearing the green skirts of the Takarazuka uniform. The girls jumped to their feet and bowed very low until the elderly woman had passed.

She led me to a room covered with exquisite white tatami and containing at one end a raised platform of matched cypress planks polished of a golden brown. It was obvious that this was the room of a dancing teacher.

The woman introduced herself as Teruko-san, now the first great Takarazuka star. She had been, in her da-

a legend and now she handed the legend down to the young girls waiting for her on the rock. They came to her five days a week and submitted themselves to the tyranny of her masklike face which now drew close to mine.

Teruko-san sat with me on the floor, arranging her kimono with precision, and I saw that her garments were five shades of gray matched in delicate harmony and accented by a single thin line of blue showing about the neck. Her tabi were white and accentuated the outlines of beautiful and powerful feet. They reminded me of Hana-ogi's superb feet and Teruko-san must have intended this, for she said promptly, "Major Gruver, if you cause Hana-ogi to leave us it is not only the great stage she will lose. It is also this." With a slow motion of her hand, as if she were participating in a dance, she indicated the perfect room, stopping with her finger pointed at a frame containing a massive motto written in strong characters by a great Japanese novelist.

She said, "Our motto: 'Be pure. Be right. Be beautiful.'"

Then she said, "When I die Hana-ogi is to follow me, for she is our finest dancer. I believe she is to be even greater than I, for when I danced I was alone and stood out like Fuji-san. But today there are many good dancers and Hana-ogi dominates them all. And do you know why they are good?"

I bowed deferentially toward her and she said, "Yes, they are excellent because I teach them as a famous old man taught me. In this way we keep alive the art of Japan."

As Teruko-san droned on I could hear Hana-ogi's bright voice with its sometimes-hoarse edge cutting at my heart, I could see the meticulous manner in which she folded the edges of her kimono to outline her wonderfully strong neck, and I could see the classic manner in which she danced. I could believe that these things had come in part from this room. Teruko-san said, "If you persist, Hana-ogi will never return to this room."

Then she pulled a clever trick. She said, "You must sit

here, Major Gruver, for I am to give a lesson," and the interpreter went to fetch the nine young girls. They came in quietly, practiced little steps on the tatami then deftly dropped away their green skirts and climbed onto the low stage in bright dancing tights.

Teruko-san was transformed. Instead of a gracious elderly lady she became a vigorous, stage-stamping dancer much better than even her best pupil. She led them through one single step for a long time and I detected one or two girls who looked as if they might honestly become dancers and I realized that Teruko-san had intended that I see in these struggling children—they were fifteen I judged—the Hana-ogi of some years back and as I looked at these lovely faces now perspiring as Hana-ogi did when she had run through the alleys to our home, I could imagine the days and years she had studied.

When the girls left, Teruko-san said, "I have wanted you to understand exactly what you are doing." She led me to the gate and to my surprise dismissed the interpreter and walked with me back to the dormitory, which was deserted in the late afternoon. She nodded to the guard and took me to a small room, pushed aside the paper door and told me to enter saying, "Hana-ogi."

The room was as beautiful as the girl I loved. Along one wall were the lacquered drawers and trays and chests in which she kept her belongings. The rest of the room was bare and clean and glittering. There were eight creamy white tatami, so it was not a big room, and six bright cushions around a very old brazier of gold and green ceramic in which charcoal rested on a pile of gleaming white sand. A low table and four jet-black bowls for food completed the furniture except for one shelf which held copies of the plays Hana-ogi had acted in. The only ornamentation was a single Japanese print in excellent colors of a bridge suspended in the moonlight over a rocky gorge with a crescent moon low in the sky. I felt that I was growing to understand Japanese prints, and the more I understood them the more I liked them.

But this time Teruko-san had been too clever, for it had been her intention that I see this room and lament that I was taking Hana-ogi from it; but it had quite the opposite effect. The room cried out in the late afternoon shadows that I should go ahead and marry its owner. No woman so vital as Hana-ogi could be destined for so narrow a prison. The wood of the room was beautiful, but Hana-ogi was more so. The tatami were neat, the books were important and the Japanese print no doubt represented one of the peaks of art—but so did Hana-ogi, and in addition she was a glorious woman, one who delighted in hurrying through the dark alleys of Osaka to join the man she loved.

But if her room gave me permission to love her, what I saw next gave me a direct order to do so, for as Teruko-san and I passed down the hall from Hana-ogi's room I happened to look through sliding doors that were ajar and saw the room next to Hana-ogi's.

It was remarkable in that it was also of only eight tatami, but it was crowded with dolls and fluffy brown bears and pillows edged with pink and blue lace streamers and tables with birds out of glass and corners filled with delightful odds and ends. It was the room of a young girl who enjoyed all aspects of life and it abounded in that happy clutter so loved by people who don't have to make up their minds. I looked at Teruko-san and she said, "Fumiko-san." Then she pointed to the table, low and exquisitely carved in the ornate Chinese style, and with no English at her command told me that that was the table Fumiko-san's father used when he committed hara-kiri in the debacle of August, 1945. The room frightened me and I wanted to get out of it.

At the entrance to the dormitory I bowed very low and said, "Domo arigato gozaimasu, Teruko-san." She was pleased that I spoke even that trivial Japanese, so she bowed equally low and said, "Do itashi mashite, doro," and I hurried to the train that would take me back to Osaka just as fast as possible.

How can I recall the journey of a young man

ately in love as he moves across the picture-book landscape of Japan to a city of canals where he will meet his beloved? My train crossed the Muko River and I could see the Bitchi-bashi, where I had often waited for Hana-ogi and where young girls now passed swirling their green skirts. For a few seconds I followed the footpath that led to the dormitory and here four of the great stars walked arm in arm. At the dormitory itself I saw Fumikosan entering the dark and towering wall of cryptomerias.

Now I was in the countryside and I could see the rice fields crowding right up to the last inch of railroad tie. Beyond were the trim clean villages with roofs of red tile and temple roofs of golden tile. In the fields were old men pulling harrows and women digging, while along the village streets children laughed and played loud jumping games.

There was a momentary thrill as the train pulled into the junction town of Nishinomiya, for I knew that when I looked across the station platform I would see a gigantic poster for *Swing Butterfly* with a huge picture of Hana-ogi in the middle. I spent my time waiting for the through express, wondering what the people on the platform would think if they could have known that in a few endless minutes I would be with Hana-ogi and she would be slipping into a gray and blue kimono so that she could sit upon the floor with me for a bowl of cold fish and vinegar rice?

The express from Kobe roared in and I avoided the coach where the officers of General Webster's command sat very formally in freshly pressed uniforms. Instead I sought out a back car from which I caught glimpses of the Inland Sea and soon we came to where the river emptied into the sea through great concrete culverts, and promptly we entered Osaka itself, where the train plunged through a canyon of ugly houses hung with laundry and into a tunnel which brought me to the noisy, crowded station. As I approached the canal I was alive with excitement. I was young and I was coming to the end of a journey that I wished I might make each day of my life:

from Takarazuka to Osaka, where Hana-ogi was waiting.

And when I reached home the wonder of my journey was increased, for there was Hana-ogi waiting for me with the news that Joe had driven a colonel to Tokyo and Katsumi would be gone for two days on business of her own. Once more we had a home to ourselves. I slipped into my blue-and-white cotton kimono and shared cold fish and rice with her. When the meal was over I said, "Teruko-san came to see me today. She showed me her dancing school. The one that could be yours some day. Now I know why you want to stay at Takarazuka."

She sighed and said she was glad that I understood why she could not come with me to America, but I added, "And I also saw your little room. With the lovely print." I made my hands fall like the gorge in her solitary picture. At this she blushed and held her hand against the stray-hair sideburns along her cheek. I said, "And when I saw that bare room which holds you like a prisoner—no life—no one to love . . ."

I caught her in my arms and a tremendous surge of love attacked us and later when I lay upon the tatami watching her select her clothes for tomorrow I said, "So we'll be married as soon as possible. You'll love New York. You can see hundreds of shows, some like Takarazuka, but none of the actresses will be beautiful like you."

I was imagining her in New York, so I rose and showed her how she could pull the wanton hair that crept upon her cheeks up into place. She did so and studied herself in a mirror. "Now you look like an American girl," I said. She pulled the hair back down and said, "Japanese way more better." But I convinced her that if she wanted to she could look almost American, so she tucked her hair in and the Japanese sideburns were gone. This sounds strange, but I believe that on a New York street few would recognize that she was from Japan.

PHARMACIST'S MATE: "In Kobo there's this guy who can straighten her eyes for eight bucks."

In the morning I begged her to stay with me to the last minute, but she insisted upon leaving early and asked me to call a taxi. I recall the language we had finally invented ourselves:

Iana-ogi: Rroyd-san, you takushi preeze. (Please get xi.)

: Daijobu, I takushi, get, ne? (All right, I'll get one.)

Iana-ogi: I rike stay with you. Keredomo I train go, to. (But I must catch the train, really.)

: More sukoshi stay, kudasai. (Stay a little longer, ase.)

Iana-ogi: Dekinai, Rroyd-san. No can stay. (I'm sorry. in't stay.)

: Do shi'te, whatsahurry? (Hey, why hurry?)

Iana-ogi: Anone! Takarazuka, my job-u, ne? I job-u ne? (Listen, I have a job.)

: Chotto, chotto goddamn mattel! Takarazuka ichi-ji t now. Ima only 10 o'clock, ne? (Wait a minute!)

Iana-ogi: Anone! Rroyd-san, you mess my hair, ne? I uty saron go, make nice, desho? (Desho is the sweet meaningless word which makes the sentences of Japanese s musical and tender.)

: No, no, no. Anone! You takusan steky now. (Listen! i're plenty pretty now.)

but she left, nevertheless, and my last warning was t she must have her hair done American style. Toward ning Joe blew in with some Suntory, the Japanese sky we had both come to like so much, and we had a et celebration while we waited for the girls and pretty n Hana-ogi arrived in her new hair-do. It was a trans-nation. "Wow!" I cried. "She could walk down Fifth nue and knock them all dead." She blushed nervously

and I believe she would have been pleased with her American look except that Katsumi arrived and ruined everything.

She had bandages over her eyes and peered out through slits. Joe immediately guessed that she had been in an accident but I remember looking with a certain agony at Hana-ogi and muttering to myself, "Oh, damn it to hell! She's gone and had that lousy operation!"

And I was right. Dear, good Katsumi wanted more than anything else to look like an American. Then Joe would be proud when he took her home; so on the first day he had left her alone she had sneaked over to the quack doctor in Kobe. For eight dollars he had slashed her upper lids to make the Mongolian fold fall back into place. He had performed this operation over a thousand times and sometimes his remodeling enabled girls to lose their Japanese look completely.

Proudly Katsumi stood before us and dropped away her bandages. Joe cried, "What have you done?"

Even more proudly the little girl opened her eyes slowly, one by one. "Now I have good eyes," she said.

The result was horrible. I gasped and Hana-ogi looked away. But Joe just stood there. He was about six feet from her when she turned to face him and he could see that what had been a glorious and typical Japanese face was now a conglomeration. I was watching Joe but no one could ever guess what he thought just then. Once he started to speak but stopped. Then he went over and kissed his wife and said, "By damn, Katsumi, you look more like an American than I do."

"I so proud," she said, dropping her new face against his arms.

There was a moment of silent intensity in the room and then Hana-ogi said, "Rroyd-san, we walk take, ne?" Joe looked at me and asked belligerently, "Whatsamatta, anythin' wrong?" and I replied, "Nothing at all. I think Katsumi looks swell."

But as soon as Hana-ogi and I reached the canal she cried, "Why she do that? She not proud to be Japanese?"

Deftly she thrust her two forefingers onto her upper lids and pulled them up into mere slits, crying, "I like Japanese eye. I like!" Then she started to sob and I tried to comfort her, but she pushed me away and with strong fingers clawed down the strands of hair that I had tucked up and they fell upon her cheeks in the Japanese style. As she did this her fingernails caught in her flesh and a thin stream of blood trickled down to her chin. I tried to wipe it away but she cried, "I proud to be Japanese. I not want to be American. I like Tokyo, not New York."

I had to stand there in the cool night and watch her gazing at her face until the blood stopped. Then she turned to me defiantly and said, "You no like Japanese eye, eh? You ashamed Japanese face. You want me cut my eyes, too?"

I put my arm about her and kissed the torn skin. I said, "When you pulled your eyes far up you looked like the Utamaro print. You were beautiful. But that day in Kyoto I wasn't prepared for such beauty."

I was about to say more when she clutched my arm and whispered, "Ssssh!" pointing to a group of young streetwalkers lounging by the canal. They were the unlucky ones who had not been able to grab onto a G.I. for the night. Osaka was a leave city for our troops in Korea and had accumulated more streetwalkers than any other city in the world, so that any one girl's chances were slim. They recognized Hana-ogi and gathered about her.

"Is it true," they asked, "that you are marrying an American?"

When she said she didn't know they were depressed, it was to them the highest dream they could envisage was to get a G.I. who might take them to the States, but they knew there was little chance, for American chaplains and Japanese secret police investigated all girls, and prostitutes were weeded out. Unemployed for the night, they pressed in on Hana-ogi and asked, "Have you a picture?" She had none, so they produced strips of paper on which they printed her name in the Chinese characters used for

all names. One of the girls studied her signature and asked, "What's your real name, Hana-ogi?"

At first the actress refused to say, then, feeling deep in the Japanese mood, she said softly, "My name was Kaji." Immediately the girl touched Hana-ogi on the wrist and cried, "You are kaji, kaji!" Then she twisted her hands high into the air.

I asked what this meant and Hana-ogi said, "In Japanese my real name means fire."

One of the girls who knew English struck a lighter some G.I. had given her and cried, "Fire, fire!"

Another girl quickly called, "Cigaretto, Major?" I passed a package around and in the night I could see a ring of little flames, and later Hana-ogi said defiantly, "I am proud to be an actress for such girls—for all the girls in Nihon."

When the streetwalkers had departed I resumed my argument and asked, "What did you mean when you said you didn't know if you were marrying an American?"

She made a sign with her hands, like a flame falling through night air, and said, "The fire goes out."

"No!" I cried. "There are some fires that never go out."

She leaned against a tree growing near the canal and said, "Long ago Teruko-san loved the Supervisor. They were very happy and were going to commit suicide at Kagon Falls. But they didn't and now he's a famous man and she's a famous woman and they meet sometimes and have tea. She speak me today."

"But the flame didn't go out—or she'd have forgotten. Believe me, the flame was still there."

Then she said an astonishing thing. "You'll go home and marry Eileen . . ."

"Eileen?" I cried. "Where did you hear . . ." I had never spoken her name.

"Yes," she said. "You marry Eileen (she pronounced it Eireen) your father tell me."

"My father?"

"Yes. General Hot Shot Harry. He come see me late one night."

Bitterly I kicked the earth, for I could feel my father ordering things again. "Did he talk you into this?" I demanded.

"No! He say if I want to marry you O.K., but he know never do it."

"What did he tell you?"

"He very nice, very kind man. He speak you marry Ileen. I think so too."

I pleaded, "Don't believe what he said. Years ago he ragged me into a life . . . I've done all right but it was ever my decision."

She touched the insignia on my blouse and asked, "You no happy? Air Force?"

I cried, "It's been one life . . . I've liked it . . . But there could be others."

She grasped my hand tightly and said, "Sometimes I have been afraid of you because you are in uniform. My mother was in uniform and he became cruel. Your army hang him. I am afraid of uniforms." Then she put her head on my shoulder and said, "But you—your father—good men."

I was deeply agitated and struggled desperately to get down—for once in my life—to the hard bed rock of living. I said, "Hanayo, you are the hope of my life. If you leave me all the things . . ."

She said in Japanese, "I know, Rroyd. For me you are also the key. With you I could become a woman and a mother and we could travel in London. I could love you and help you . . ."

She became exquisitely tender and I knew then that with her as my wife I could find the solid basis for existence that had so far escaped me; and I was aware that for her, too, I was the only escape she could ever know. If she rejected me now she could become only the glorious outline of a woman, imprisoned in little rooms or on mammoth stages—loved only by other women.

I lifted her in the air and cried, "Then we'll be married?"

She stared at me and said "No."

I dropped her gently to the bank and kissed her impassive, golden face, thinking bitterly of the stories I had heard about white men in strange lands. Always the yellow girl tried to seduce these clean-cut men away from their decent white sweethearts, for everyone knew that yellow girls plotted evil ways to lure white men. And if the yellow girls succeeded the white men sank lower and lower toward barbarism. "Damn it," I cried, "this story's all loused up!" When Hana-ogi looked up in surprise I said, "I'm a West Point honor man. In the story you're supposed to beg me to marry you. Hanayo-chan, please beg me."

She started to laugh at my comic plea, but then I think she glimpsed the empty years that faced her, for she took my hands and held them to her face, confessing in a tone of Japanese doom, "I don't want to become the lonely old woman who teaches dancing." (I recall her words: "I not grad be woman old in house dance teach no man come.")

Her lament burned my heart and I cried, "Then marry me."

This time she answered in a lower voice, still freighted with that inevitable sense of tragedy that seems to haunt the Japanese, "I never intended marrying you, Rroyd-san. Japanese-American marriages are no good. We read about Japanese girls in America—what happened in Cedar Rapids."

"When why did you come to live with me?" I demanded in anguish.

She pressed her lovely head against mine and said softly in Japanese, "I know it was wrong. But for me it was my only chance in life to love a man. No Japanese man would marry me—what the man in museum told you. Oh, maybe a fish-catch boy or a rice-plant boy, maybe such a man would have me. But Japanese men are very cruel to wives like me. Rroyd-san, in all the world you were the only man I dare love."

She started to cry, the bitter lament for a section of her life coming to an end at last.

be there with her, to hear her committing herself to the inverted world of the Takarazuka girls and the green, flowing skirts and me to airplanes and the management of war. I grasped her hands and cried, "Hanayo-chan! Please! It's our lives you're speaking of. Marry me!"

Limply and in despair she drew her hands away. Then, raising her arms as if to embrace the entire sleeping city of Osaka she said with tragic finality, "I Japanese. I always Japanese. I never be happy nowhere." (As she said it: "I nebber be grad.") Then the misery of her heart overcame her and she started to cry again. Looking down, to keep her tears from me, she saw one of the crumpled Kodak envelopes used by the P.X.'s in Japan. One of the prostitutes, photographed by some soldier lover, had discarded it. Delicately Hana-ogi stooped for the orange paper and pressed it out. Then with an achingly beautiful hand she pointed to the trademark used by Kodak in Japan: that tremendous and sacred statue of Buddha at Kamakura, the ancient capital. Its vast, impassive face was enshrined as a symbol of the Japanese nation and slowly Hana-ogi's hand left it and indicated her own symbolic face with its beautiful Japanese eyes and classic mouth. "One poet say my face same like this face of Kamakura. I very proud." Then in a tender, forgiving gesture she pointed to our dark alley and asked sadly, "Katsumi-san marry American boy, ne? What happen to her, desho?"

The answer to that one arrived next day in the form of a special Fourth of July present for Joe Kelly, our overseas hero. We had celebrated the holiday by sneaking out into the country with a couple of picnic baskets. In the distance we had heard fireworks going off in some village near Kyoto and Katsumi had said, "Japanese love to celebrate. Even American holidays we enjoy." But when we got back to Osaka, Joe found the fateful letter tucked under the door. We had all known it must arrive soon but even so we were unprepared. Joe's hands trembled as he read the bad news.

up," he said weakly.

He showed me the sheet of paper which I at once recognized as one not intended for enlisted men to see, and West Point training welled up. "How'd you get hold of this?"

"A friend of a friend," he said.

I read the impersonal phrases which two months before would have meant nothing to me. "American military personnel married to Japanese wives will be rotated home immediately lest their allegiance to the United States be doubted." Farther down it said, "This applies especially to personnel whose marriages have occurred since April 1, 1952." Then there was the usual baloney passage about commanders providing every assistance to men who must make unusual arrangements for wives forced to remain in Japan.

Joe asked bitterly, "What do they mean by unusual arrangements? Getting her a job in a good whore house?"

"Joe, take it easy!"

"It ain't easy to take."

"Joe, I've seen hundreds of orders like this. They all peter out."

"I think they mean it this time, Ace. Should I write to my Congressman?"

In spite of my original feelings on this point I now said, "Take it clear to the President, Joe." I turned and kissed blackened-eyes Katsumi on the cheek and said, "I wish we had a million gals like you back home."

Joe said, "This is important to you, Ace, because one of these days you may be tryin' to bring Hanayo into the States."

"I'm already trying," I said. Then desperately I added, "Hanayo can't make up her mind but I started the paper work this morning. Just in case." I noticed that Hana-ogi gasped at this and was about to protest, but Joe interrupted by pointing to the corners of the wood-and-paper house.

"I had it good here," he said grimly. "Wonderful wife, baby comin', friends, a home. Well, that's all."

bounces." As he surveyed the impending ruin he took refuge in the phrase which our men across Korea had adopted as their reaction to the dismal tricks of war: "That's the way the ball bounces."

For Joe the ball took an evil twist. An implementing letter arrived next day with a cold, hard list of the men who were to be sent home and under the K's Joe found his name. He took the list immediately to Lt.Col. Craford, who said, "I told you you were goin' home. I got our men on that list. Everyone of 'em's been in to cry the blues."

"But my wife is havin' a baby."

"All wives have babies. That's what wives are for."

"Can I be transferred back to Korea?"

The colonel grunted, "You're the fourth guy who would rather go back to war in Korea than go home to the States. You really prefer Korea?"

Joe saw a chance to remain in the area and cried eagerly, "Yes!"

Lt.Col. Craford turned away in disgust and said, "It's disgraceful when a man prefers Japan to America, but when he'd rather go back to Korea it's insanity."

"Then I can go?" Joe begged.

"No!" Craford shouted. "You get to hell home. All of you Jap-lovers, get home where you belong." He looked at Joe's papers and asked, "Where is your home?"

Joe said, "Osaka."

Craford flushed and said, "I mean your real home."

"Osaka," Joe repeated doggedly.

Craford banged the desk and shouted, "You get out of here. I oughta court-martial you."

Without thinking Joe caught him up on it. "Would that mean I could say in Japan?"

Craford became apoplectic and sputtered, "All right, see guy. All right. When the shipping list comes out you won't have to look. Because your name is gonna be first."

When Joe reported all this I got sore. I've watched my brother deal with hundreds of human problems and al-

though he's as tough a general as they come, he always puts men first. In France there was a saying in his outfit: "If your wife is dying, don't bother with the colonel. He'll say no. See General Gruver. He'll say yes." So I told Joe, "You hate the military, kid, but this isn't standard. I'll fight this all the way to General Webster."

I caught the train to Kobe and when we stopped at Nishinomiya there was the poster of Hana-ogi smiling down at me.

General Webster didn't smile. For the first three minutes he never gave me a chance to get a word in. "Who in hell do you think was just in here?" he concluded. "The Supervisor of the Keihanshin Kyuko Railroad!" He waited for this to take effect, but I didn't comprehend, so he said in disgust, "The railroad that runs the theater where you've distinguished yourself—beyond the call of duty."

I waited for the explosion but there was none. General Webster smiled pleasantly and said, "It's all been settled. The Japanese-American scandal has been solved by the Webster-Ishikawa negotiations." He bowed and said, "His name was Ishikawa."

Mimicking a diplomat he continued, "The terms of the Webster-Ishikawa treaty are these." He handed me a sheaf of stapled papers and said, "You fly back to Randolph Field. The actress girl goes to Tokyo."

"When?" I cried.

"Both of you exit these parts on July 10—five days."

Then, to my amazement, he insisted that I have lunch with him, and when we got to the Officers Club Mrs. Webster and Eileen were waiting. We conducted ourselves with the punctilious indifference you give a man who has returned from a leprosarium, but Mrs. Webster was too old a veteran of the social battlefields to play such a game for long. Her opening salvo was, "Have you seen this month's show at Takarazuka? The girl who plays the lead is lovely."

I was still sore about the way Joe Kelly was being treated, so I said to myself, "If all bets are off, here goes,"

and I said aloud, "I know the girl and she's very talented, but I came to Kobe to try to argue your husband into letting Private Kelly remain in Japan."

"Who's Private Kelly?" Mrs. Webster asked.

"His Japanese wife is having a baby and he's being sent home—without her."

The general grew red in the face and tried to change the subject but Eileen jumped in on my side, "Rotten trick, I'd say."

Her father said, "Don't scowl at me. It's an area order."

"What happens to the baby?" Eileen asked.

The general laid down his napkin and said, "I argued with Kelly for half an hour, warning him not to marry a Japanese girl."

This did not satisfy Eileen who asked, "Does the Army force them to desert their wives? Aren't they legally married?"

"Yes, they're legally married," snapped the general. "We have to allow them to get married and then we have to leave the wife stranded."

"This is serious," Eileen protested. "Doesn't anyone try to prevent such inhuman foolishness?"

General Webster addressed Eileen directly, "I argued with this boy. Lloyd argued with him. Where'd it get so?"

But Eileen said, "I'm not talking about what has happened. I'm talking about the injustice of what's going to happen."

Mrs. Webster interrupted and asked, "How are you involved in this, Lloyd?"

I took a deep breath and said, "Kelly's from my outfit in Korea." (From the corner of my eye I saw the general flush with relief that I had not embarrassed him by mentioning Hana-ogi, but I had no intention of avoiding the issue.) "And it also happens that I'm planning to marry a Japanese girl myself."

I had dropped my napalm. The general gulped. Mrs.

nd on mine and said, "I always knew you had guts."
I said, "Thanks, I guess I'd better go now."
Mrs. Webster asked weakly, "The actress?"
"Yes."

The general said, "Lloyd's not marrying any actress.
e's being sent home on Thursday."

I started to leave but Eileen insisted upon walking to
e door with me, as if I were the girl and she the escort.
'm proud of you, Lloyd," she said. "I wish you all the
ck in the world." We shook hands and I thought of a
ozen things to say but none of them made much sense,
o I said, "I'm sorry we got things loused up," and she
id, "It was mostly my fault," and then as I was leaving
he laughed and said, "Remember the time I asked you
you ever felt like just grabbing me and hauling me off
o some shack?"

We both smiled awkwardly at this and she said, "That's
ust about what you did, wasn't it? But with somebody
lse." She kissed me on the cheek and said good-
aturedly, "Well, I'm glad you turned out to be a man
nd not a mouse."

When I got back home I found Joe and Katsumi alone
n a kind of dull panic. "I been all over it with every-
ody," he said. "Even went to see the consul, but every-
ne flashes the marriage papers at you and says, 'You
igned 'em. You knew you couldn't take her to America.'
as if that made everything just dandy."

Since I already knew that his name was at the head of
he list I hadn't the courage to ask him what the latest
ot dope was, but he came out with it, "I'm first on the
rst draft."

Katsumi, saying nothing, prepared the meal while I
atched the door for Hana-ogi. She arrived about seven
nd I could tell that she had already been ordered to
Tokyo. She had a nervousness about her that I had not
een before and I wondered if she was aware that I was
eing flown home. We looked at each other for a moment
s she kicked off her zori and then neither of us could

continue the duplicity. She ran weeping across the tatami and cried, "Rroyd, Rroyd! I Tokyo go five days!"

I caught her in my arms and hugged her as if I intended to crush her then so that she could never escape. "I fly back to Texas right away."

She pushed me away and cried, "You leave Japan?" I nodded and she burst into sobs, calling to Katsumi in Japanese. The two girls stood in the middle of the room and looked at Joe and me and for the four of us the world slowly fell apart.

There is one Japanese custom I had grown to love and Hana-ogi fled to this as relief from the tension of my crumbling home. She went to the bath corner and started a charcoal fire raging under the huge square wooden tub. When the water was hot she called, "Come on, Hana-ogi, I scrub your back."

I went into the little room where steam surrounded me and washed down with soap, rinsing myself as before I climbed into the tub. The water was almost scalding and Hana-ogi took a kind of soft bark and scrubbed my back for twenty minutes while we talked of that day's decisions.

When my heartache had been soaked away she soaped herself down, rinsed off and took my place while I scrubbed her back. As soon as we exited Joe and Katsumi took over and at nine we were all sitting cross-legged about the sukiyaki bowl while Katsumi served us an excellent meal. Hana-ogi said, "We never forget this time," and the warmth of the bath, the vigor of the scrubbing and the good friendship of our home made us ignore for a while the penalties that hung over our heads. I think we all knew that never again in our lifetimes would we know quite the same intense friendship and love that we shared that night and Joe said glumly, "I hate to think of livin' in some Chicago roomin' house-waitin'."

Toward midnight the inescapable gloom of our position settled firmly upon our little house so that Hana-ogi and I felt we had to break free and walk in the cool night air. The stars over Osaka were the same that had shone upon America seven hours earlier: Vega and Arcturus and Altair. They recognized no national barriers and I found myself—an officer sworn to protect the United States—thinking that some day we might catch up with the stars.

But as so often is the case, no sooner had I entertained this fleeting thought than I willingly became more of an American than I had ever been before. For at the head of our alley appeared a large gang of toughs screaming "Americans go home! America go to hell! Go home!"

They swarmed down the alley in frenzy. When they reached the house of Masako Fukada, the girl with the G.I. baby, they knocked the door in and dragged her into the street, screaming, "Kill the American bastard."

Before I could do anything, Hana-ogi dashed toward the center of the infuriated mob. Although she was risking her life at Takarazuka, and more besides, she dived for Masako, who was being kicked in the stomach, and threw herself across the girl's body.

This enraged the hoodlums, who waved their torches and shouted in high-pitched voices that Hana-ogi should be killed for going with an American. I started for them, but Hana-ogi cried a warning to stay away. This caused the mob to turn toward me and in the lurid light of the flickering torches these fanatical faces looked exactly like the cartoons of the Japanese barbarians we had kept posted in our ready rooms during the war years. I remember one horrible face rushing at me. It was distorted, evil, brutal and inhuman.

"You're for me, you Japanese bastard!" I cried and launched a dive at his belly. Another Japanese swung a club upward at the same moment and I thought my head had been knocked away, but my momentum carried me on and I crashed into the ring leader and felt the wonderful impact of my body against his and the thudding fall onto the ground with him uttering a shaken grunt. I started to smash at his distorted and hateful face. At the same time I had sense enough to shout, "Hey, Joel!"

The little tough burst right through his own paper doors brandishing a rifle butt. He flailed a path to me and we tried to defend ourselves, but I was bleeding from the face and started to faint.

"For Christ sake," the little gangster cried. "Not now! We got 'em runnin'."

The next second he collapsed under three Japanese clubs and I fainted. Later I learned that the anti-American mob would have killed us except for the pachinko players. They were at the canal end of the alley, sitting gloomily in the dark after the closing of the pinball parlors and one of them to whom I used to speak in English when I played pachinko heard Joe shout my name. They realized we were in trouble and they knew we were their friends.

Little Watanabe-san and the man who was keeping two geishas and the man whose wife beat him and the man who beat his wife and the man who had been in the penitentiary rushed up the alley. I am told there was violent battle, but I knew nothing of it. The last thing I saw was a Japanese face—not one of the evil masks, but Hana-ogi's oval and yellow beauty as she lay fearful and with her eyes closed across the body of unconscious Masako Fukada.

When they brought me to I heard little Joe repeating quietly, "No, no! Don't send for an Army doctor. Get Jap doctor." He was explaining to one of the pachinko players, "I learned it in Chicago. Never call a cop. Cops never help anybody." When I awakened, with a touch of streak of bruised face, I saw Hana-ogi again. She said, "I'm not hurt." Immediately I felt better and as the night progressed I began to feel absolutely good. In our little house was crowded with alley people. They were sitting in kimonos or sat cross-legged on the floor, leaning back in their breath and sipping the green tea that Watanabe-san served them. They said, all of them and with repeated emphasis, "The hoodlums who attacked you—they were not Japanese. They were Korean communists. We are Japanese. We are your friends." I remember one young man, a tough, capable laborer who still wore the peaked cap of the Japanese army. I had played pachinko with him and had given his four children presents. He spoke in mumbled tones and knew no English but he said, "They weren't all Koreans. Many Japanese hate you Americans. But I fought against you in Guadalcanal." (I

thought: "In those days you'd have beheaded me.") "And you have behaved much better in Japan than I expected. Now I am your friend. Those in the street, they were communists."

All the same, next day Masako-san and her American baby left our alley and we never heard of them again. Masako's mother stood in the roadway cursing the girl for having caused the riot and the other women of the alley looked away.

That was Sunday. On Monday the Air Force officially notified Joe that he would be flown back to America on Wednesday. To Joe it was the sentence of torture. I found him sitting cross-legged on the floor studying the notice with dull resignation. He looked up grimly and asked, "Why should I be punished? Why should I have to go back to the States?"

Automatically I replied, "The way the ball bounces."

"No!" he shouted. "What's there for me in America?"

I assured him, "You'll get out of the Air Force and find a job and pretty soon Katsumi'll follow you."

He looked at me sadly and said, "I wish it was goin' to be so simple."

I recall every incident of that powerful and uneventful day. I drifted out to Itami to wind up my paper work and have lunch with Mike Bailey who told me, "My affair with Fumiko-san is washed up cleaner than a sergeant's shirt on inspection. She said she was afraid something bad would happen. Suicide, broken life, unwanted baby. She said such things occurred in her family beause they were aristocrats and took life awful hard. She said Hana-ogi was the kind of girl to be. Strong and brave."

I went over to Takarazuka for my mail and found a letter from my father which said, "I follow the war news more intelligently since my talk with you. No doubt your attractive little Butterfly has told you I called on her that night. You're lucky to have known such a fine girl. I have hopes Mother and I shall see you in Lancaster one day soon. Until then, I am profoundly proud of a son who can bag seven enemy planes. Harry."

In mid-afternoon I caught the train into Osaka and once more experienced an overpowering sense of identification with this strange land. The fields I saw could have been fields that Hana-ogi and I were working. The old people were her parents and the fat young babies were ours. The endless struggle for life was our struggle.

Once when Joe Kelly had cried, "I don't want to go back to America," I was on the point of knocking him down as an unpatriotic moron. Now, on the Takarazuka train, I knew that a man can have many homes and one of them must be that place on earth, however foreign, where he first perceives that he and some woman could happily become part of the immortal passage of human beings over the face of the earth: the childbearers, the field tillers, the builders, the fighters and eventually the ones who die and go back to the earth.

I had discovered this passionate emotion in Hana-ogi's country and for me—a United States officer bred in patriotism—the crowded fields between Takarazuka and Osaka, the insignificant canals, the tiny house, the tatami mats and the bed roll unfurled at night would be forever one of my homes.

This haunting sensation stayed with me as I walked through Osaka that sunny afternoon for on passing a print shop I saw in the window an old wood-block portrait of some classic beauty of Japan. She had a mountain of black hair with big yellow combs stuck through, and she reminded me of that day in the Kyoto museum. Instinctively, I stepped inside the tiny shop and bowed to the proprietor. "Do you happen to have a wood-block print of Hana-ogi?" I asked. I wanted to take her with me when I left Japan. The proprietor grew quite mournful and indicated that he had no English, but in a whisper he was out in the street shouting and soon the inevitable girl who had learned the language from sleeping with American soldiers appeared.

"What you want, Major?" she asked.

"I'd like a picture of Hana-ogi."

"Ah, so desu-ka!" The man hurried back to a case and

soon appeared with six of the glossy photographs sold at Takarazuka. They showed my Hana-ogi as a sheik, a Venetian gondolier, a Chinese prince and as three other handsome young men. I bowed very low and said, "I did not mean that Hana-ogi. I meant . . ." and I pointed to the picture in the window.

"Sodal" cried the man.

"Ah, soka, soka!" cried the girl, and they indicated by their manner that if I were interested in such a picture I was one of them. Two hangers-on in the store joined us as the man shuffled through a stack of prints. Finally he produced one, a brilliant thing with iridescent black background showing Hana-ogi upon the day of her return to the green cages of Yoshiwara: glorious with amber needles through her hair and many kimonos. Her eyes were notably slanted and tinged with blue, her teeth were jet black and the hair around her ear came down in sideburns. She was timeless and she was Japan.

The little street girl said, "This picture not real. Only copy. But very old. Maybe one hunner years." The men watching sucked in their breath and complimented me as I carried away the living memory of Hana-ogi.

THE NOODLE VENDOR: "Soba, soba,
soba."

It seems strange, but I can remember each of the trivial things that filled this lovely Japanese day. When I entered our alley I passed the pachinko parlor and stuck my head in to thank the men who had helped me in my brawl with the communists, but most of them were so engrossed in their pinball games that they scarcely looked up. I then crossed the alley to the flower shop and indicated that I wanted a bouquet for our house. The little man—I keep using that word because these men were really so very small—started a cascade of Japanese, then went to the street and shouted till a boy came. Always, in Japan, there is someone who knows English. This boy explained that since I must soon go back to America, the flower man wanted to give me three most special flowers. When the shopkeeper handed them to me they looked like the ordinary flowers that American girls wear to football games. I had often bought them for Eileen Webster but now the boy said, sucking in his breath in astonishment, "Very unusual, chrysanthemum blooming in July." He added that this was the national flower of Japan and looked with absolute covetousness as I took them from the flower man.

Thinking little of the gift I carried the flowers to our house, but as soon as the girls saw them they sucked in their breath just as the boy had done, and Katsumi ran into the street to announce that we had chrysanthemums in July. Soon our little room was filled with neighbors who sat upon their ankles staring at the three wonderful blooms. From time to time new men would arrive, bow to Hana-ogi, sit upon the floor and contemplate this miraculous accomplishment. Even Watanabe-san left his pachinko to see. The boy who had been my translator

joined us and explained this strange thing: "On the road to Kobe a florist has a big glass house in which he grows these flowers. In one section there are cloth blinds to keep out the sun. With an almanac to guide him, this clever man causes the sun to set earlier each day so that within the space of three weeks it seems to run the course of four months. The flowers are fooled. They think that autumn is upon them and they bloom." The men sucked in their breath in admiration.

Now Katsumi suddenly felt the first life in her work and fell slightly forward. Hana-ogi washed her forehead in cold water and Joe, faced by the necessity of leaving his pregnant wife behind in Japan said loudly, "I hope just one thing. I hope Colonel Craford goes home and buys himself a new Buick, light blue, and I hope I'm drivin' it down the avenue when I'm comin' up the old way with a Mack truck."

I was about to caution Joe against taking a pass at Craford when I looked up to see Hana-ogi arranging her kimono. It was blue and white, very soft for summer wear. With it she wore two undergarments of thin cloth: pink silk and white cotton. I thought I had never seen her so lovely. Unmindful of me she experimented with the sheer lines of her garments until she brought them into a pattern which made her more beautiful than the picture I had bought. I was about to share this with her when she raised both hands and combed down her hair about her face so that it rested in the Japanese style. Studying herself in the mirror, she nodded approvingly. Then she heard me laugh and quickly knelt beside me. "Rroyd-san," she said. "I got to be this way. I Japanese. I think she expected me to be hurt, but I unrolled the print and as soon as she saw the bold characters in the upper corner she cried, "Hana-ogi Rroyd-san, you buy. When we had studied the picture for a moment she went to Katsumi's trunk and returned with a drawing brush and an ink stone. Using the firm Chinese characters long ago adopted for Japanese writing, she added a free column of print at the picture's side: "Hana-ogi of Tal

organizing human life, and I became truly engrossed in the tragedy of these dolls.

We were watching one of the many classical plays in which two lovers commit suicide. In this one a married man fell in love with a beautiful Yoshiwara girl, whom Hana-ogi identified for me in the dark as "just like old-time Hana-ogi." I don't imagine any American has ever really understood the ins and outs of a Japanese tragedy but I did get the impression of two people caught in an increasingly unbearable set of pressures. Just what these pressures were I never grasped but Hana-ogi and Katsumi wept softly and when I asked what about they said, "It's so sad. People talking about this man."

But what I did understand was the musicians. For the mysterious men in black never spoke. The dialogue was sung by an amazing man accompanied by four musicians playing samisens. Maybe *sung* isn't the right word, for I have never heard more eerie sounds. The singer was a fat, bald-headed man in his late sixties who sat on his haunches, and as tragedy on the puppet stage deepened he would lean forward and scream in unbelievable fury until his round face became purple and the veins stood out in his neck. During love passages he would narrate the scene in a quivering feminine wail and as the remorseless pressure of society bore down on the lovers he would make his voice rough and horrible like a broken saw against a rusted nail. To hear this man was a terrifying experience for I had not known the human voice to be capable of such overpowering emotion. I would defy anyone not to be unnerved by that stupefying voice.

Now, as the hounded lovers approached the historic scene at Amijima where they would commit suicide together, the mysterious black figures on the stage whirled about in what seemed like a confusion of fates, the wooden dolls marched stiffly to their doom and the inspired story-teller shrieked in positive terror while the muted samisens played doleful music. There was another round in this remarkable tragedy, but this I wasn't aware of until the curtain had closed: all the women near me

were weeping and as I looked away from the epileptic singer, his face at last relaxed as if he had gone suddenly dead, I saw lovely Hana-ogi sitting with her hands folded in her kimono, sobbing desperately. She was so bereft that tears might have come to my eyes too, but when I turned her face toward mine I saw that she was in no way unhappy. A look of ecstasy had captured her wonderful face and her eyes glowed. I was astonished and whispered, "What's the matter, Hanayo-chan?"

"It was so beautiful," she said.

"What? The singing?"

"No," she replied softly, taking my hand. "The double suicide. It was so tender."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

The women around me were rising now and on each face I saw this same look of ecstatic satisfaction. Apparently the double suicide had inspired them even more than it had Hana-ogi. I was not surprised, therefore, when she made no attempt to explain this mystery, but when I looked at Katsumi and saw on her tear-stained face the same look of rapture I had to acknowledge that for the Japanese audience this double suicide had provided a vitally satisfying experience.

"What's it all about?" I asked Katsumi, indicating the weeping women.

"The lovers," she said quietly, pointing to the now barren stage. "At last they found happiness."

"They're dead," Joe said.

As we walked through the broad, clean streets of Osaka back to our canal I became hurtlingly aware that there would always be many parts of Japan that Joe Kelly and I could never penetrate. "What happened back there?" I asked Joe. "All I saw was a bunch of dolls and a man shouting."

The little guy laughed as if he hadn't anything to worry about and said, "Every time you see Kanami-san break down into sobbing for Toyô Binkô her heart has broken. Used to come one side. Then I found out what was cooking. First time it was in the same way."

shot himself because he was charged with stealin' government money. Katsumi said it was so beautiful she had to cry. Next time it was a geisha from Kyoto. Cut her throat. That was especially lovely."

Hana-ogi heard me laugh and turned sharply. I expected her to upbraid me but instead she took my hand and sniffled. "You not understand," she said. "To have courage. To have honor. Is very beautiful."

As we entered the pathway leading to our canal, conversation was broken by a substantial commotion. We heard voices crying and hurried to our own alley in time to see the launching of a magnificent display of fireworks. "Ahl" Hana-ogi whispered. "I forget. Tanabata. And long after the fireworks had ceased the people of alley stood staring up at the stars. In Japanese Hana explained: "Vega, the princess star, fell in love with Altair, the herdboy star. Unlike American fairy story the herdboy married the princess without any trouble then like our stories, he loved his wife so much that he allowed his sheep to stray so that the king threw him to the other side of the Milky Way river. Once each year in July he swims the river and makes love with his princess. For the people of Japan this Tanabata is the night of love."

But Hana-ogi and I as we spread our bed roll reasoned that we had two more nights to spend together, so we left the love-making to the princess and her shepherd while we lay side by side listening to the exquisite sounds of the Japanese night. The old blind man who massaged sore muscles and burned moxa powder on nerves passed along our alley, sounding a melancholy flute and tapping with his gnarled cane. For a while there was silence. Then we could hear Watanaabe coming home from his pachinko game with his wife clapping at his heels. Hana-ogi snuggled close to me and said, "All time we never fight," but I touched her rival scar beneath her sideburns and asked, "What about the time I wanted you to become American?" Then she grew somber and said, "Because I know you, now

better Japanese. You better American." Then I almost broke down. I wanted to lose myself in her love and confess, "I can't live without you, Hanayo-chan. God, I cannot face the lonely world without your tenderness." But I knew that we had two more nights to spend together and I was afraid that if I allowed myself full sorrow now the next nights might be unbearable. I choked once and buried my face against hers, feeling her Japanese eyes against my lips, her black Japanese hair against my face. "Oh, darling," I whispered, "why can't you marry me?" She clasped her arms about me as she had done that first night in the woods by the Shinto shrine and said, "Some people never love anyone." (She said it: "Rots peopre nebber rub nobody.") "Oh, Rroyd-san, I love you till my feet are old for dancing—till my teeth break off same like Hana-ogi's."

I thought I could not bear this but then came the sweetest night sound I have ever heard, the soft passage of the noodle vendor, pushing his belled cart while he played a rhythmic melody upon his flute. All through the night the noodle men passed through the streets of Osaka sounding their lovely melody. Some used five running notes ending in a faint call. Others played a minor tune. Some played random notes and a few, whom you came to remember and cherish, played songs that might have been termed love songs, for they seemed always to come by when you were sleeping with the girl who shared your bed roll on the tatami.

For the rest of this night, as I recall, Hana-ogi didn't even place her arm across my body and although it seems ridiculous this is what we said. I asked, "Don't you think we ought to take Joe and Katsumi to dinner tomorrow?"

She replied, "No, I think we should."

"Damn it, Hanayo, will you explain once more why you say, 'No, we should,' and 'Yes, we shouldn't.'"

Patiently she went over it again. "In Japanese polite to say that way. If you speak no to me, I say no to agree with you."

"I still don't get it."

"Ask me a question."

"Don't you want to marry me?"

"Yes, I not marry you."

"But what I asked was, 'Don't you want to?'"

The game stopped for she whispered, "No, no, Rroyd-san. I do want to."

I grumbled, "I can't understand either your grammar or your heart."

She placed my hand upon her heart and the delicate golden warmth of her slim body swept over me and she said, "My heart for you takusan, takusan. Remember when you say me that?"

I remembered, and as the sweet song of the noodle vendor echoed down our alley we fell asleep.

OSAKA GIRL TO MARINE ON LEAVE
FROM KOREA: For Japanese dancing
Hana-ogi now ichi-ban.

If Monday was peaceful, Tuesday was not. Hana-ogi and I woke about eight-thirty to find that Joe had left for one last appeal to Lt.Col. Craford. Katsumi, sensing that we would want to be alone, went out to lament with friends, so I started a fire and Hana-ogi, wrapped in a sheet, tried to get breakfast, but I kept pulling the sheet away until she finally surrendered it altogether, whereupon we propped a chair against the sliding doors and let the fire go out.

At eleven Hana-ogi dressed for Takarazuka. I tied her obi for her and she insisted that I leave the ends dangling almost to the floor. Taking a few mincing steps she cried, "I maiko girl!" Then deftly she swept the ends together in a bow, symbol of older girls, and said, "I virgin no more. I married woman." So far as I can remember those were the last words she said that morning. I watched her go down the alley and all the women in the open-front stores and houses called out to her on that summer morning.

She was gone only a few minutes when Joe came back. He was licked. He threw his cap on the floor and asked in final despair, "Ace, what can I do?"

"Take a deep breath," I said. "Stick it out. They'll have to change the law."

"In Washington they got fifty senators like Craford. You think they're gonna change the law?" He looked wild-eyed.

"Joel Ease up."

"How can I? Ace, I'm a no-good punk. If I go home without Katsumi it's pool halls and hamburger joints. I couldn't take it."

"For a while you have to."

He sat down cross-legged on the tatami and said, "In Chicago, I killed a man. A mixed-up son of a bitch. They couldn't pin anything on me all my fault. They couldn't pin anything on me 'cept apologizin', because it could just as well be my fault. Because I was no damn good. And if I'm no damn good, I'll be no damn good again."

I knew there was something I ought to say, a standard word of courage, but I couldn't think of one. Joe said, "A guy like you, from a good home, wouldn't understand. For the first time in my life, I'm livin'. At night when I hear Katsumi come up the stairs, shufflin' her wooden shoes—later when she puts her head on the pillow next to mine—when I see the plain goddamn goodness in that girl..." He looked at the tatami and I guessed that he had tears in his eyes. I wanted to say that I knew but I was tied up.

"Joe, promise me you won't get into trouble with Craford."

He looked up at me as if Craford were already a part of him. "Him?" he sniffed. "The only time I believe in God is when I think of that fat slob. God must be keepin' his eye on bastards like that. Otherwise nothin' makes sense." I said, "Remember, Joe. You promised you'd make trouble with that..." I searched for a name and only the total misery of Joe's problem rose in my mind. I made bile. I grew purple and cursed Craford for some minutes. I cursed my father and General Webster and Mrs. Webster and every convention that made it possible for Hana-ogi and me to marry. Then I stopped. I was still quivering with accumulated fury.

Joe looked up at me and said, "Thanks, Major. I thought you felt that way."

I was still shaking. I said, "Even so I believe things will work out."

He said, "I don't."

There was nothing to add. He knew how I felt. He knew I was with him. Maybe I had steered him away from some hot-brained mistake. That's the best I could hope, so I went over to Itami to clear out my desk and

borrow Mike Bailey's car, but as I left the air base for the theater, where I was to see the last performance of *Swing Butterfly*, I had a disgusting experience which even at the time seemed to me a premonition of tragedy. Outside the main gate of the air base at Itami a broad road stretched for more than half a mile. It was filled with cheap dance halls, beer joints, razzle-dazzle dives and plain whore houses. In front of each establishment lounged gangs of young girls and the stretch was known as "The 1,000 Yard Dash." It was claimed that any American in uniform who could negotiate this honky-tonk strip and keep his pants on would receive a prize of \$1,000 for heroism beyond the call of duty.

As I drove out of the air base for the last time I saw the frowsy halls: "Villago Bar," "Club Little Man," "The Flying Bull," and "Air Force Heaven." Then, to my disgust, my car stalled and three girls promptly surrounded it. One climbed in and said, "O.K. General. Where we off to?" Immediately an M.P. appeared and hauled the girl back onto the strip and gave me some brotherly warning, "Watch out for her, Major. She's no good."

He sat down cross-legged on the tatami and grimly, "In Chicago I killed a man. A mixed-up affair, not all my fault. They couldn't pin anything on me. Not apologizin', because it could just as well have been my fault. Because I was no damn good. And if I'm no damn good, Katsumi I'll be no damn good again."

I knew there was something I ought to say, some standard word of courage, but I couldn't think of one. Joe said, "A guy like you, from a good home—wouldn't understand. For the first time in my life I'm livin'. At night when I hear Katsumi come up the stairs shufflin' her wooden shoes—later when she puts her head on that crazy hard, little pillow next to mine—when I see that plain goddamn goodness in that girl . . ." He looked down at the tatami and I guessed that he had tears in his throat. I wanted to say that I knew but I was tied up.

"Joe, promise me you won't get into trouble with Craford."

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I said, "Remember, Joe. You promised you'd make it all right with Craford." I searched for a name and suddenly the total misery of Joe's problem rose in my mind like bile. I grew purple and cursed Craford for several minutes. I cursed my father and General Webster and Mrs. Webster and every convention that made it possible for Hana-ogi and me to marry. Then I stopped but I was still quivering with accumulated fury.

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ould have happened fifty years from now. Then maybe here would have been a chance. In my day there was no chance for such a marriage." I saw myself in years to come. Junior officers would boast, "You can say that General Gruver looks tough and formal but did you know that when he served in Japan he ran off with a geisha girl? Yep, took her right out of a house." But they would never know.

However, the distaste of this experience along the strip was expelled by Hana-ogi's exquisite performance. When I had first seen her I had been insulted by her burlesque of Americans and I had been unable to appreciate her ability. Now my reaction was different, for I discovered that even against my will I had to laugh at her lampoon of Americans. The reason was simple. She had studied with intimate care my mannerisms and now reproduced them in burlesque form. When she lit a cigarette she mimicked me, when she propositioned Madame Butterfly it was me trying to kiss her on the Bitchi-bashi. This time I, more than anyone else in the audience, enjoyed her burlesque of Americans.

As her big dance number approached I became apprehensive, for I suspected that her aping of Americanisms would dull her Japanese touch, but I was wrong, for in her samurai there was now a freedom and swagger that no maiko girl, as Hana-ogi termed the virgin dancers, could have created. Hana-ogi was the artist. Even more than mistress or wife, she was an artist, and if her American jitterbugging was more hilarious for having studied an American at close hand, her Japanese classical dance was stronger for having known that American not as a subject for study but as a lover—as one who cried eagerly to marry her. I understood what she had said the night before. She was now a better Japanese.

When intermission came I wanted to rush backstage and embrace her and tell her that no matter if she lived a million years cooped up at Takarazuka, I would be with her every time she danced—but I was not to see her, for I could not get into the dressing-rooms.

subordination and desertion would be the charge and we might never get Katsumi into the States, so I asked Jesus, are you sure he deserted?"

"I checked him in. Sharkey saw him leave."

We stopped at the canal and I led the way to the alley, where two M.P.'s tried the door. It seemed to be barred, so they were going to break the freshly mended paper, but at that moment it seemed like my house and I didn't want the paper broken, so I said, "Maybe the chair's against it. I'll use the window."

One M.P. came with me to the back of the house where I forced open a window and started to crawl in. While my leg was still suspended I saw Joe. He was on the floor with his head blown apart by a .45. Across him, obviously having died later, lay Katsumi with a kitchen knife plunged completely through her neck.

For a moment I didn't call out or anything. All I could do was look at the floor—at the two lovers who had needed each other so much. The M.P. came up and looked over my shoulder. Then he called loudly, "You better break the door down, Sharkey."

I watched the frail doors bend and break. I heard the clatter of wood and the tearing of paper and the door through which Hana-ogi had so often come at dusk, dropping her silken packages on the floor, were gone. Sharkey took one look and said, "Get the camera. You want to catch this just as it happened."

Sharkey barked to the man at my shoulder, "Eddie, you inform the Jap police." Then he saw me and said "We'll need you here, Major."

I got down out of the window and walked around the front of the house where a crowd had gathered and where children were screaming the tragedy across the canal to other children. An old man pried his way through the broken doors and came out to report accurately upon the double suicide.

I was numb with helpless anger. Of all the people in the world, Joe and Katsumi Kelly should have been protected and kept alive. I thought of them laughing and

helping each other and I got all sick inside, but then I thought of Hana-ogi, who would be coming home soon and I grew panicky for her because the photographers had arrived and were taking pictures like mad.

And then I saw, on the outskirts of the crowd, two of the little prostitutes Hana-ogi and I had met the other night. They were already working the main streets and had stopped by to witness the tragedy. I said to them, "You remember Hana-ogi?"

"Sure, Major."

"You watch up there. Tell her to go back. Please."

"Sure, Major. You got cigarettos?"

The other girl pointed to the house and jabbed herself in the stomach as if with a knife. "They kill?"

I nodded and they stared at the house with grim fascination. "Japanese girl and G.I.?"

I said yes and the little girls moved toward the head of the canal where they could intercept Hana-ogi while the reporters swarmed at me. They were bright young men, most of whom spoke English, and I had enough sense to keep my mouth shut, for if I had said anything at all I would have blurted out, "They wanted to ship him back to America but he insisted upon staying in Japan." Finally I composed myself and said, "He was with my outfit in Korea. This is a complete shock."

The reporters saw somebody else and swarmed away but one stayed and asked, "Aren't you Ace Gruver?"

I nodded.

"You the one living with Hana-ogi?"

I wanted to shoot him dead but everything had collapsed now, so I nodded grimly and he pointed to the canal.

There at last she was, Hana-ogi. Late afternoon sun played upon her tousled black hair and illuminated the fall of her kimono. With eager pin-ted steps she hurried along the canal, coming so close that I could see the slant of her adorable eyes and that sweet mouth always ready with a teasing smile.

The two prostitutes stopped her, informed her of the

suicides and tried to prevent her from joining the crowd. She ignored them and started coming toward me down the canal bank but the newspaperman who was standing with me broke away, ran toward her and spoke rapidly. She peered across the crowd searching for me, and when she failed to find me she broke away from the guardian prostitutes and the warning newspaperman to fight her way resolutely toward the very spot where the police waited.

In that moment I could see the reckless collapse of her world and instinctively a shout rose to my lips. I called in panic, "Lo, the postillion!"

She stopped. The smile that had crept upon the edge of her lips vanished and her lovely face once more became an impersonal mask. Standing on tiptoe, she peered across the crowd, still seeking me, but I hid myself so that she would have to go back. After a moment she turned away from the crowds that shoved toward the suicide house and I last saw her moving with extraordinary grace back to the main street. The summer breeze, drifting down the canal, tugged at her kimono and twilight rested on her hair. I can still see the folds of cloth meticulous about her neck. Then she moved behind a pillar and I never saw her again.

For just as I started to run after her, Lt.Col. Craford waddled up and he seemed almost to relish the tragedy. It proved he was right and that guys like Kelly were no damned good. He saw me and lurched over to repeat his warning that he was shipping me . . .

"You bastard!" I cried. "You stinking bastard!"

He jumped back as if I had kicked him and began to bluster but I couldn't take any more. "You swine! Kelly told me what you said to him, you bastard! You killed this kid!"

He was astonished at my outbursts and suddenly became aware that if I was really outraged I might carry the fight to my father, so he tried to pacify me, but I said, "Don't be afraid of me, you dirty bastard. I'm not going to squeal on you—but you murdered this kid."

He withdrew and a Japanese police official said, "You come with me," and for three hours while I ached to seek out Hana-ogi I had to answer questions and fill out reports as to the death of Katsumi-san. It was after ten o'clock when I was released and I caught a cab whose driver gasped when I said Takarazuka, but he drove me there and at eleven that Sunday night I hurried past the cryptomerias and into the dormitory where Hana-ogi lived.

Apparently I was expected, for old Teruko-san and her grim-faced interpreter were waiting for me. "Hana-ogi-san is not here," they said firmly.

"I know she's here!" I cried.

"Hana-ogi-san is on her way to Tokyo."

"She can't be! I saw her!"

"Please, Major Gruver. Hana-ogi-san is not here."

Unthinkingly, I forced my way past the two women and along the corridor on which Hana-ogi lived. The Takarazuka girls peered at me as I stormed past, then sighed when I reached Hana-ogi's empty room. It was so empty. The little things that made it hers were gone.

From the next room Fumiko-san appeared and said, weeping, "Hana-ogi-san really go, Major."

I turned around like a madman. It couldn't end this way—across a canal, over the heads of a hundred people at the scene of a suicide and Hana-ogi departs forever. "She's here!" I insisted.

I stood helpless and then saw in one corner of her room a zori that she had forgotten. I stepped across the tatami on tip-toe as if she were still there, reproving me for not having removed my shoes, and I lifted the zori and it seemed as if her powerful, inspired foot were there in my hand, with the big toe clinging to the zori strap and the Japanese music beginning and the samurai dance about to start and Hana-ogi . . . oh, Hana-ogi . . .

"Hanayo-chan!" I shouted. "Hanayo-chan! Where are you?" From their doors the beautiful Tr stared at me impassively. The world se dark and I screamed, "Hana-ogi, don't le

GENERAL WEBSTER: "Whatever makes you a better man makes you a better husband."

General Webster called me in to Kobe next day and said "That was a dreadful affair last night in Osaka." He asked me if I had heard any rumors that Lt.Col Craford had handled the affair badly. I wanted to put a blast on the fat blubber-gut who had murdered Kelly, but something old and powerful inside me argued, "Why start a military mess?" and I kept my mouth shut. Then I shrugged my shoulders and said, "I guess Craford handled it O.K."

But immediately I knew that I was reverting to the man I had been when I first argued with Kelly against marrying a Japanese girl. I was defending the Army against the man and I felt ashamed of myself. I must have shivered, for General Webster said gruffly, "Lloyd, don't take this so bitterly. Kelly's dead. Nobody can do anything about it. You told me yourself he was a dead-end punk—beyond saving."

I looked at the general. A man under his command had committed suicide rather than return to the United States and he was shrugging it off. I asked, "What about that colonel in Tokyo who shot himself rather than leave his Japanese girl? Or the major in Yokohama? Were they punks?"

"Yes! They were second-class men. I've seen reports on seven such suicides and they were all shoddy material. First-class men sometimes fall in love with native girls, of course they do. But they get over it. They forget the girls and they go home. They go back to work."

"Damn it!" I shouted. "Why do men like you and my father call them native girls? Can't you believe . . ."

General Webster was remarkably patient. He stopped me by thrusting a yellow paper into my hand. "I suppose a young man's no good if he doesn't have the guts

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to fight for what he thinks is right," he said. "You've had the courage to fight for Joe Kelly and his native girl. It was gallant, Lloyd, but it wasn't necessary. Read it."

The yellow paper was from Washington and it said a law was being passed to permit men like Joe Kelly to bring their Japanese wives into the States. "Now they do it!" I cried.

"They were doing it all along," Webster said. "Everyone knew the old law was bad."

I thought of Joe and Katsumi lying in blood and I felt sick. I had to see Hana-ogi. In all the world she was the only person who could help me now. My heart and my mind cried out for her. "Sir," I blurted, "I've got to get to Tokyo."

"It's forbidden, Lloyd. You're flying home."

"I don't care what happens. I've got to see Hana-ogi."

The general winced as I used the strange name, then said calmly, "If you disobey another order . . ."

"All right, I'll leave the Air Force. I'll get a . . ."

I expected General Webster to hit the roof, but when he's away from his wife he isn't so bad. He said, "Sit down, Lloyd. I'm not going to throw my weight at you. You're being a stupid idiot and we both know it, but you come by it naturally."

"What do you mean?"

"This seems like 1924."

"I don't understand," I said dully.

"Your father was mixed up with a girl—the one I told you about. There was one member of our class you've never met. Chap named Charley Scales. He had a chance in '24 to drop out of service and take a good job with General Motors. So your father decided to marry the girl and chuck the Army and go along with Charley, but some of us saner fellows talked him out of it. Must run in your family."

"My father was going to leave the Army?"

"Yep. He was all broken up." General Webster laughed and scratched his chin. "I remember that we were quite

sorry for him. We thought he was pretty weak to be broken up like that over a waitress. Look at him now."

I said, "I think he made a mistake in 1924."

General Webster breathed a sigh of relief and said, "So do I, but I guess any man has a right to get mixed up with a waitress once . . ."

"I don't mean that. I mean he probably should have married the waitress."

"Lloyd! Your father a Chevrolet salesman!"

"I mean he should never have married my mother. They've never been happy."

"Happy? What's happy? He's a great general."

"I think he's made a mess of his life."

General Webster got mad. "You think! Who in hell are you to think? Only a few men in any generation can be great generals. Don't you forget it!"

I said, "I still want to marry this girl."

"Son," General Webster said, "the Supervisor of Tax-

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The car followed him at a walking pace, with a subdued humming sound caressing to the ear. After about twenty yards it passed him and stopped a short distance ahead; then the door opened again. He walked on without turning and again heard that melting voice imploring him: "Marcello, jump in . . . please do . . . forget what I said yesterday . . . Marcello, d'you hear me?" Marcell could not help saying to himself that the voice was rather repugnant—why should he moan in that way? It was luck there was no one going along the street or he would have been ashamed. Nevertheless, he did not want to discourage the man altogether, and as he went on past the car he half turned and looked back, as though inviting him to persevere. He found himself throwing him a glance almost of encouragement, and was suddenly and unmistakably aware of the same feeling of not unpleasant humiliation of playing a part not entirely unnatural to him, that he had felt for a moment when the boys had fastened the petticoat round his waist. It was as though fundamentally he did not dislike acting the part of the coy, disdainful woman—was, in fact, led on by nature to do so.

Meanwhile the car had started again behind him. Marcell wondered whether the moment had come to yield and decided, on reflection, that it had not yet arrived. The car passed close to him, not stopping but merely slowing down. He heard the man's voice calling to him, "Marcello . . ." and immediately afterward, the sudden hum of the engine as the car moved forward. He was afraid that Lino had lost patience and was going away; he was assailed by a great fear of having to show himself a school next day empty-handed; and he started running crying out, "Lino . . . Lino . . . stop, Lino." But the wind carried his words away, scattering them in the air with the dead leaves in a cheerless, noisy squall; the car was growing smaller and smaller in the distance—evidently Lino had not heard and was going away—and he would not get the revolver, and Turchi would start tormenting him again. Then he sighed with relief and walked on at a more or less normal pace. The car had gone on ahead not to avoid him but to wait for him at a crossing; and i

had now stopped, blocking the whole width of the pavement.

He felt a kind of annoyance at Lino for having given him this humiliating moment of suspense, and he made an inward decision, in a sudden access of cruelty, to make him pay for it by carefully calculated harshness. Meanwhile, without hurrying, he had reached the crossing. The car was standing there, long, black, all its old brass fittings and antiquated coachwork glistening. Marcello started off as though he were going to walk round it: immediately the door opened and Lino looked out.

"Marcello," he said in a decided but despairing voice. "Forget what I said to you on Saturday . . . You've done your duty now . . . Come on, get in, Marcello."

Marcello had stopped beside the hood of the car. He turned and came back a step and said coldly, without looking at the man, "No, I'm not coming . . . but not because you told me on Saturday not to come . . . just because I don't want to."

"Why don't you want to?"

"Why should I? . . . Why should I get into the car?"

"To please me . . ."

"But I don't want to please you."

"Why? You don't like me?"

"No," said Marcello, lowering his eyes and playing with the handle of the door. He was aware that he had put on a vexed, obstinate, hostile expression, and no longer knew whether he did this as part of the game or in earnest. It was certainly a game that he was playing with Lino, but if it was only a game, why did he have such strong and complicated feelings about it—a mixture of vanity and repugnance, of humiliation and cruelty and contempt? He heard Lino laugh softly and affectionately and ask him, "Why don't you like me?"

This time he raised his eyes and looked him in the face. It was true, Lino was unattractive, he thought; but he had never asked himself why. He looked at his face, almost ascetic in its thin severity, and then he understood why he was not attracted to Lino: it was a double face, a face in which dishonesty had found, positively, a physical expression. It seemed to him as he looked at it . . . could

detect this dishonesty especially in the mouth—a mouth that at first sight was subtle, thin, contemptuous, chaste, but which, when the lips were parted and turned back in a smile, showed an expanse of glowing mucous membrane that glistened with the water of appetite. He hesitated, looking at Lino who was waiting for his answer with a smile, and then said with sincerity, "I don't like you because you've got a wet mouth."

Lino's smile vanished and his face darkened. "What nonsense are you inventing now?" he said. And then, quickly recovering himself, he added with easy facetiousness: "Well then, does Mister Marcello wish to get into his motorcar?"

"I'll get in," said Marcello, making up his mind at last, "only on one condition."

"And what's that?"

"That you'll really give me the revolver."

"Yes, that's understood . . . Now come on, get in."

"No, you've got to give it to me now, at once," Marcello obstinately insisted.

"But I haven't got it here, Marcello," said the man with sincerity, "it was left in my room on Saturday . . . We'll go to the house now and fetch it."

"Then I'm not coming," Marcello decided in a way that he himself had not expected. "Good-bye."

He moved a step forward as if to go away; and this time Lino lost patience. "Come along, don't behave like a child," he exclaimed. Leaning out, he took hold of Marcello by the arm and pulled him into the seat beside him. "Now we'll go straight to the house," he added, "and I promise you, you shall have the revolver." Marcello, secretly delighted to have been compelled to get into the car, made no protest; all he did was to pout childishly. Lino closed the door with alacrity and started the engine; the car moved off.

For a long time they did not speak. Lino did not appear talkative—perhaps, thought Marcello, because he was too pleased to talk; and as for Marcello, he had nothing to say. Now Lino would give him the revolver and then he would go home and next day he would take the revolver to school with him and show it to Turchi. Beyond these

simple and pleasing anticipations his mind did not travel. His only fear was that Lino might try in some way to defraud him. In that case, he thought, he would invent some other trick to drive Lino to desperation and force him to keep his promise.

Sitting still, with his package of books on his knee, he watched the great plane trees and the buildings slipping past, until they reached the far end of the avenue. As the car started up the hill, Lino, as though he had been thinking about it for a long time, asked, "Who taught you to be so coquettish, Marcello?"

Marcello, not quite certain of the meaning of the word, hesitated before answering. Lino seemed to become aware of his innocent ignorance, and added, "I mean so clever."

"Why?" asked Marcello.

"Well, never mind."

"It's you who are the clever one," said Marcello; "you promise me the revolver and never give it to me."

Lino laughed and put out his hand and patted Marcello's bare knee. "Yes," he said, "today I'm the clever one." Marcello, embarrassed, moved his knee; but Lino, still keeping his hand on it, added in an exultant tone, "You know, Marcello, I'm so pleased you came today. When I think that the other day I was begging you not to take any notice of me and not to come, I realize what a fool one can be sometimes . . . yes, an absolute fool. But luckily you had more sense than I did, Marcello."

Marcello said nothing. He did not altogether understand what Lino was saying to him, and besides, the hand resting on his knee irritated him. He tried more than once to move his knee away but the hand still remained. Fortunately, at a bend in the road, there was a car coming in the opposite direction. Marcello pretended to be frightened, and exclaimed, "Look out, that car's coming straight at us!"—and this time Lino withdrew his hand to turn the steering-wheel. Marcello breathed again.

They reached the country road with its high walls and hedges, then the archway with its green-painted iron gates, and finally the drive, with its rows of cypresses on each side and the light glass of the veranda at the far end. M

that the wind was tormenting the cypresses just as it had the last time, under a dark and stormy sky. The car stopped, Lino jumped out and gave a hand to Marcello, and then they went off together toward the door. To-day Lino did not go on ahead but held him tightly by the arm, as though he feared he would try to escape. Marcello wanted to tell him to slacken his grip, but there was no time. Lino seemed almost to be holding him suspended in the air, as if they were flying; and in this way he hurried him through the hall and pushed him into the passage. There, quite unexpectedly, he seized him roughly by the neck, saying, "How stupid you are . . . how stupid . . . why didn't you want to come?"

His voice was no longer jovial, but hoarse and broken, though with a mechanical sort of tenderness in it. Marcello, surprised, was on the point of raising his eyes to look into Lino's face, but at that moment he received a violent shove from behind. Just as one might thrust away a cat or a dog after seizing it by the back of the neck, so Lino had hurled him into his room. Then Marcello saw him turn the key in the lock, put it in his pocket and turn toward him with an expression of mingled joy and raging triumph. Lino cried in a loud voice, "That's enough now . . . now you've got to do what I want . . . that's enough, Marcello, you tyrant, you little beast, that's enough . . . come along, do as you're told and not another word."

These commanding, contemptuous, arrogant expressions were uttered with savage delight, with an almost sensual enjoyment; and Marcello, bewildered as he was, could not but notice that they were words without sense, more like fragments of some triumphal chant than expressions of conscious thought and will. Frightened and astonished, he watched Lino as he strode up and down the room, pulling his cap from his head and flinging it on the window sill, snatching a shirt that was hanging over a chair, rolling it up in a ball and then shutting it up in a drawer, smoothing the crumpled bedspread, performing all sorts of practical acts with a frenzy full of obscure significance. Then, still shouting out incoherent phrases of an insolent, peremptory nature, he went

over to the wall at the head of the bed, tore down the crucifix and threw it with pretentious brutality into the cupboard drawer; and Marcello realized that by this gesture Lino intended in some way or other to make it clear that he had swept aside his last scruples. As though to confirm Marcello's fear of this, Lino took the coveted revolver from the drawer of the bedside table and showed it to him, shouting, "You see it? . . . Well, you're not going to have it—never . . . You've got to do what I want without any presents, without any revolvers . . . either for love or by force."

So it was true, thought Marcello; Lino intended to cheat him, just as he had feared. He felt himself turn white in the face with anger; and he said, "Give me the revolver or I'll go away."

"No, no, there isn't a chance of it . . . either for love or by force." Lino was now brandishing the revolver in one hand; and with the other he seized Marcello by the arm and hurled him on to the bed. Marcello fell in a sitting position, but with such violence that he banged his head against the wall. At once, Lino, passing suddenly from violence to gentleness and from command to entreaty, knelt down in front of him. He put one arm round his legs and laid his other hand, still grasping the weapon, on the bedspread. He groaned and called upon Marcello by name; then, still groaning, flung both arms round his knees. The revolver now lay loose on the bed, black against the white coverlet. Marcello looked at Lino as he knelt there, his suppliant, tear-stained face, burning with desire, now raised toward him and now lowered again and rubbed, like the muzzle of some devoted dog, against his legs. Then he grasped the revolver and, with a violent thrust, rose to his feet. Immediately Lino, thinking possibly that the boy meant to return his embrace, opened his arms and let him go. Marcello took a step into the middle then turned round.

Later, thinking over what had happened, he could not help recalling that the mere butt of the weapon had aroused in him

of the most ruthless and bloodthirsty kind; but at that moment all he was aware of was a violent pain in his head where he had knocked it against the wall, and an acute sense of irritation and repugnance toward Lino. The latter had remained on his knees beside the bed; but when he saw Marcello take a step backward and point the revolver at him, he turned slightly but without getting up, and throwing out his arms with a theatrical gesture, he cried dramatically, "Shoot, Marcello . . . kill me . . . yes, kill me like a dog."

It seemed to Marcello that he had never hated him so much as at that moment, for that repulsive mixture of sensuality and austerity, of repentance and lust; and in a manner that was both terrified and deliberate—just as though he felt he had to comply with the man's request—he pressed the trigger.

The shot resounded with sudden violence in the little room; and he saw Lino fall and then raise himself again with his back towards him, clutching at the side of the bed with both hands. He pulled himself up very slowly, fell sideways onto the bed and lay still. Marcello went over to him, put down the revolver at the head of the bed and called in a low voice, "Lino," and, without waiting for an answer, went to the door. But it was locked, and he remembered that Lino had taken the key out and put it in his pocket. He hesitated, disliking intensely the idea of fumbling in the dead man's pockets; then, his eyes falling on the window, he remembered that the room was on the ground floor. Sitting astride the window sill he turned his head hastily, casting a long, frightened cautious look at the open space in front of the house and the car standing outside the door: he knew that if anyone happened to pass at that moment, they could not fail to see him sitting there in the window; yet there was nothing else to be done. But there was no one, and beyond the scattered trees round the house even the bare, hilly countryside appeared to be deserted as far as the eye could reach. He climbed down from the window, took his package of books from the seat of the car and

walked there was reflected in his consciousness, as in a mirror, the picture of himself, a boy in shorts with some books under his arm, walking down the cypress-bordered drive, an incomprehensible figure full of gloomy foreboding.

PART ONE



CHAPTER 4

HOLDING his hat in one hand, Marcello took his dark glasses off his nose with the other and put them away in his jacket pocket. He entered the hall of the library and asked the attendant where he could find the files of newspapers. Then, without hurrying, he went up the broad staircase where a big window on the landing at the top blazed with the strong light of May. He felt light and almost empty, with a sense of perfect physical well-being of intact youthful vigor. The new gray, plain-cut suit he was wearing added to this feeling another that was no less pleasant, that of a serious, precise elegance that accorded with his own tastes.

On the first floor, after filling in a slip at the entrance, he made his way to the reading room, to a desk behind which were an elderly attendant and a girl. He waited his turn and then handed in his slip, requesting the complete 1920 issues of the chief local newspaper. He waited patiently, leaning against the desk and looking at the reading room in front of him. Rows of writing tables, each with a green-shaded lamp, stretched away to the far end of the room. Marcello looked carefully at these writing tables scantily populated for the most part by students, and mentally selected his own—the last one at the back of the room on the right. The girl reappeared with her two outstretched arms supporting the big bound volume of newspapers he had asked for. Marcello took it and went to the table he had chosen.

He put down the volume on the sloping top of the writing table and then sat down, taking care to hitch

at last decided to hunt out in the library the notice of what had occurred so many years before. His anxiety, which had never been entirely lulled during these years, had never considered the material consequences of his act. It was, on the contrary, in order to see what sort of feeling the confirmation of Lino's death would arouse in him that he had that morning crossed the library threshold. From this feeling he would judge whether he was still the boy he had once been, obsessed by his own fatal abnormality, or the new, completely normal man that he had since intended to be and that he was convinced he was.

He felt a singular relief and, perhaps more than relief, astonishment, when he realized that the printed news on the yellow paper of seventeen years before aroused no appreciable echo in his mind. His reaction, he felt, was like that of a man who, having had a bandage over a deep wound for a very long time, makes up his mind at last to take it off and discovers, to his surprise, that the skin where he expected to find at least a scar, is clear and smooth without a mark of any kind. Looking for the paragraph in the paper had been like removing the bandage; and to find himself unaffected by it was to find himself cured. How this cure had been accomplished, he could not have said. But there could be no doubt that it was not merely time that had produced this result. Much was owing to himself too, to his own conscious will, during all those years, to escape from abnormality and make himself like other men.

Nevertheless a kind of conscientious scruple made him take his eyes from the newspaper and gaze into space, with a feeling that he wished to visualize Lino's death clearly—a thing that until now he had always instinctively avoided doing. The paragraph in the paper was written in the conventional language of journalism, and this in itself might be a further inducement to indifference and apathy, but his own evocation of the occurrence could not fail to be vivid and moving and therefore well fitted to reawaken those ancient terrors in his mind, if they still existed. And so, following obediently in the wake of memory, which, like a pitiless, impartial guide con-

turned the pages of the old newspaper—like taking the bandages from a wound and finding it completely healed; and he said to himself that perhaps under the smooth skin the old poison was still lurking in the form of a latent, invisible abscess. He was confirmed in this suspicion not only by the transient quality of the relief he had felt when first he had discovered that Lino's death was a matter of indifference to him, but also by the faint, pressing sense of melancholy, hanging like a transient mourning veil between him and reality. It was as if the memory of the Lino incident, even though dissolved by the potent acids of time, had yet cast an inexplicable shadow over all his thoughts and feelings.

As he walked slowly through the crowded, sun-filled streets he tried to establish a comparison between himself as he had been seventeen years before and as he was now. He remembered that at thirteen he had been a wild boy, rather feminine, impressionable, unmethodical, imaginative, impetuous, passionate. Now, at thirty, he was not in the least timid but perfectly sure of himself, manly, masculine in his tastes and in his general attitude, firm, methodical to a fault, almost completely lacking in imagination, cool and self-controlled. It seemed to him that he could remember having had, at that time, a certain tumultuous, indefinable richness of character. Now his whole character was well-defined though perhaps a little barren, and the poverty and rigidity of a few ideas and convictions had taken the place of that former generous, confused fecundity. Lastly, he had been confident, expansive, sometimes positively exuberant. Now he was reserved, always equable in temper, lacking in acidity if not actually gloomy, silent. The most distinctive feature, however, of the radical change that had come about in those seventeen years was the disappearance of a kind of excess of vitality resulting from a ferment of unusual and perhaps even abnormal instincts; its place seemed to have been taken by a sort of benumbed, gray normality.

If it had been merely chance, he went on to think, that had prevented his submitting to Lino's desires; and certainly his demeanor toward the chauffeur, full as it

was of coquettishness and of feminine tyranny, had been actuated not merely by childish venality but also by a confused, unconscious inclination of the senses. But now he was really and truly a man just like any other man. He stopped in front of a mirror in a shop window and looked at himself for some time, examining himself with an objective detachment in which there was no complacency. Yes, he was a man just like any other man, with his gray suit, his sober tie, his tall, well-proportioned figure, his round, brown face, his well-brushed hair, his dark glasses. He remembered how, at the university, he had discovered with a kind of delight that there were at least a thousand young men of his age who dressed, spoke, thought and behaved like him. Now, probably, that number could be multiplied by a million. He was a normal man, he thought with a sharp, disdainful satisfaction, there could be no doubt about it, although he could not say how it had come about.

He remembered suddenly that he had finished his cigarettes and went into a tobacco shop in the Piazza Colonna arcade. He went up to the counter and asked for his favorite brand. At that same moment three other people were asking for the same kind and the tobacconist quickly put down on the marble-topped counter, in front of the four outstretched hands holding money, four identical packs which the four hands removed with the same identical gesture. Marcello observed that he took his pack, felt it to see that it was soft enough, and then tore open the paper in the same way as the other three. He observed also that two of the three put the pack of cigarettes, just as he did, into a small inside pocket of their jackets. Lastly, one of the three, as soon as he got outside the shop, stopped to light a cigarette with a silver lighter exactly like Marcello's. These details gave him an almost voluptuous satisfaction. Yes, he was just like other people, just like everyone else. Just like those who were buying cigarettes of the same brand and with the same movements as he, and just like those who, when a woman in red walked past, turned—and he with them—to eye the quivering solid buttocks beneath the thin stuff of her dress. Except that sometimes, as in this last case, his resem-

blance to other men was deliberate and imitative rather than a result of a conformity of inclinations.

A short, misshapen newsboy came toward him with a bundle of papers over his arm, waving one of them and shouting at the top of his voice, his face purple with the effort, some incomprehensible phrase in which the only recognizable words were "Victory" and "Spain." Marcello bought a paper and carefully read the heading stretched across the top of the page; in the war in Spain the supporters of Franco had won another victory. He was conscious of reading this piece of news with undeniable pleasure, and he felt this was another sign of his complete and absolute normality. He had watched the birth of the war from the first hypocritical heading: "What is Happening in Spain?"; and then the war had spread and become of immense importance, had turned into a contest not merely of arms but of ideas; and gradually he had noticed that he was participating in it with a curious feeling that was entirely detached from any political or moral consideration (although such considerations often came up in his mind), a feeling very like that of a sports enthusiast who takes the side of one football team against another.

From the very beginning he had wanted Franco to win—not with any feeling of bitterness but with a profound, tenacious desire, as though such a victory would provide confirmation of the goodness and rightness of his own tastes and ideas not merely in the political field but in all others as well. It was, perhaps, from a love of symmetry that he had desired, and still desired, Franco's victory—like someone furnishing his house who is anxious to collect in it furniture that is all of the same style. For he seemed to read this symmetry in the events of the last few years, with a steady increase in its clarity and importance: first the advent of fascism in Italy, then in Germany, then the war in Ethiopia, and then the war in Spain. This progress pleased him for some reason—possibly because it was easy to recognize in it a more than human logic, and the ability to recognize this gave one a sense of security and infallibility. Furthermore, he thought, folding the newspaper and put-

ting it in his pocket, it could not be said that he had become convinced of the rightness of Franco's cause for reasons of politics or propaganda. This conviction had come to him from nowhere, as it may be supposed to come to ignorant, ordinary people—out of the air; in fact, just as one says an idea is "in the air." He took Franco's side just like innumerable other perfectly ordinary people who knew little or nothing about Spain, who scarcely glanced at the headlines of the newspaper, who were not cultivated.

It was, in fact, out of sympathy—using that word in an entirely unthinking, nonlogical, irrational sense. A sympathy that could be said only metaphorically to come out of the air; for in the air there may be pollen, smoke from houses, dust, light, but not ideas. This sympathy therefore must come from deeper layers of consciousness, and it provided yet another proof that his normality was neither superficial nor botched up in a deliberately arbitrary fashion, with arguments and motives that were mere matters of opinion. It was closely bound up with an instinctive, almost physiological condition, with a faith which he shared with millions of other persons. Here was one single, complete thing he had in common with the society and the people among whom he found himself living. He was not a solitary, an abnormal person, a madman, he was one of them, a brother, a fellow-citizen, a comrade; and this, after his great fear that the killing of Lino might separate him from the rest of humanity, was in the highest degree comforting.

In any case, whether it was Franco or another, it mattered little, provided there was a bond, a bridge, a symbol of attachment and communion. But the fact that it was Franco and not another proved that his emotional participation in the Spanish war, besides being an indication of unity and companionship, was also a true and right thing. What else could truth be, if not something that was evident to all, that was believed and held incontestable by all? And so there was an unbroken chain with all its links firmly joined, from his feeling of sympathy, prior to all thought, to the consciousness that this sympathy was felt in ex

of other persons; from that consciousness to the conviction of being in the right; from the conviction of being in the right, to action. For, he thought, the possession of the truth did not merely permit, it also imposed, action. Action was a confirmation of one's own normality that must be provided both for oneself and for others; for it was not normality at all unless it was deepened and reinforced and demonstrated continually.

By this time he had arrived. The big, open archway of the Ministry was on the other side of the street, beyond the double row of moving cars and buses. He waited a moment and then slipped in behind a large black car that was making for the same archway. He followed the car in, gave the commissionaire the name of the official he wanted to speak to, and then sat down in the waiting room, almost pleased to be waiting there like other people, among other people. He had no feeling of haste or impatience, nor of intolerance for the routine and etiquette of the Ministry. On the contrary this routine, his etiquette pleased him, as symbols of a yet vaster and more general routine and etiquette, and he adapted himself willingly to them. He felt perfectly calm and cool, even if—and this was nothing new to him—a little sad.

It was a sadness of a mysterious kind he had come to consider, by now, as inseparable from his character. He had always been sad in this way, lacking in gaiety, like some lake in whose waters is reflected a very high mountain that shuts out the sunlight from it and makes it black and melancholy. One knows that if the mountain could be removed the sun would bring a smile to the face of the waters, but the mountain is always there and the lake is always sad. Like the lake, he too was sad, but what the mountain was, he could not have told.

The waiting room, a small room leading out of the porter's lodge, was filled with a heterogeneous mixture of people, quite the opposite of what one might have expected to find in the antichamber of a Ministry so famous for the elegance and social distinction of its officials. Three individuals of debauched and sinister appearance—informers, perhaps, or plain-clothes policemen—were smoking and chattering together in low voices

next to a young woman with black hair and a white and red face, who was gaudily painted and dressed and was to all appearances a prostitute of the lowest kind. Next was an old man, cleanly though poorly dressed in black, with a white mustache and beard, possibly a school-teacher. Finally, next to Marcello himself, a small, thin, gray-haired woman with a troubled, anxious expression, who looked like a housewife and mother.

He observed all these people stealthily, with a strong feeling of repugnance. This was what always happened to him. He thought he was normal and just like everyone else when he pictured the crowd to himself as an abstract whole, as a great, existing army held together by common feelings, common ideals, common aims, an army of which it was comforting to form a part. But as soon as individuals rose to the surface of this crowd, his illusion of normality broke to pieces against their diversity, since he failed completely to recognize himself in them and felt at the same time both repugnance and detachment. What was there in common between him and those three sinister, vulgar men, between him and that woman of the streets, between him and that white-haired old man, between him and that humble, worn-out mother? Nothing at all, except for the repulsion, the pity, that he felt. "Clerici," called the voice of the commissioner. He started and rose to his feet. "First staircase on the right." Without turning, he went off in the direction he had been shown.

He walked up a very wide staircase with a narrow red carpet in the middle and found himself, after the second flight of stairs, on a vast landing with three large double doors opening from it. He went to the door in the middle, opened it and came into a big, half-dark room. In it was a long, massive table, and on the table, in the middle, a globe. Marcello walked about this room for a few moments (evidently, judging by the half-closed shutters and the covers over the settees along the walls, it was not in use), then opened one of the many doors and came out into a dark, narrow passage with glass-fronted bookshelves on each side. At the end of the passage was a partly closed door with light coming through the crack.

Marcello went up to it, hesitated, and then very gently pushed the door slightly. It was not so much curiosity that urged him to this as a desire to find an attendant to show him the way to the room he was looking for. Peeping in through the crack he realized that his suspicion that he had come to the wrong place was not unfounded. In front of him was a long, narrow room into which a suave light penetrated from a single, yellow curtained window. In front of the window was a table, and sitting at the table with his back profiled against the window was a young man with a broad, massive face and a plump figure.

Standing by the table, with her back toward him, Marcello could see a woman in a light dress with a pattern of big black flowers on a white background, and a wide black hat of gauze and lace. She was very tall and very slim in the waist, but broad in the shoulders and hips, with long legs and thin calves. She was leaning over the table and talking in a low voice to the man who sat quite still listening to her, in profile, looking not at her but at his own hand playing with a pencil on the slope of the desk in front of him. Then she moved over and stood close to the armchair, opposite the man, her back against the desk and facing the window, in a more confidential attitude; but the black hat tilted over her eye prevented Marcello from seeing her face. She hesitated, then bent over sideways and with an awkward movement, bending one leg—like someone stooping down to catch the jet of a fountain in his mouth—sought the man's lips with her own, while he allowed himself to be kissed without moving or giving the slightest visible sign that the kiss was agreeable to him. She threw herself backward again, both her own and the man's face hidden by the wide sweep of her hat, and staggered and would have lost her balance had not the man put his arm round her waist and held her up. Then she stood upright, and the man sitting in the chair was concealed by her body. It looked as if she might be stroking his head. The man's arm was still round her waist; then he appeared to relax his hold and his thick, square hand, as

the woman's buttock and remained there open and with fingers spread wide, like a crab or a spider on a smooth spherical surface that provides no foothold. Marcell closed the door again.

He went back along the passage to the room where the globe stood. What he had seen confirmed the Ministry's reputation for libertinism, for the man sitting at the desk in the room was the Minister himself and Marcello had at once recognized him; but strangely enough, in spite of his inclination to make moral judgments, this did not make any impression on the background of his convictions. Marcello was not conscious of any liking for this social, woman-chasing minister, in fact he rather disliked him; and the intrusion of his love-life into his office seemed to him highly unbecoming. But none of this affected in the slightest degree his political beliefs. It was like being told, by trustworthy people, that other important personages were thieves or incompetent or used their political influence for personal ends. He registered these items of news with a rather gloomy feeling of indifference as things that did not concern him, inasmuch as he had made his choice once and for all and did not intend to alter it. He felt moreover that such things did not surprise him because he had, in a sense, discounted them from time immemorial owing to precocious knowledge of the less amiable characteristics of mankind. But he was above all conscious that, between his loyalty to the regime and the highly rigid moral standards that governed his own conduct, there could be no possible relation. The reasons for his loyalty had origins deeper than any moral criterion and could not be shaken by a hand feeling a woman's hip in a government office, or by a theft, or by any other crime or error. Whatever those origins were, he could not have stated precisely between them and his conscious thought stood the dull opaque barrier of his obstinate melancholy.

Calmly, impassively, patiently he went to another of the doors, glanced through it into another corridor, drew back, tried a third door and at last found his way into the antechamber he was seeking. There were people sitting on the settees round the walls, and gold-laced com-

he gave one of them the name of the official he wished to see, and then went and sat down on one of the settees. To while away the time he opened the newspaper again. The news of the victory in Spain was printed right across the top, and this irritated him as an extravagance in doubtful taste. He reread the message in heavy type announcing the victory and then went on to a long despatch, but gave up reading it almost at once because he was annoyed by the mannered, would-be soldierly style of the special correspondent. He stopped a moment to ask himself how he would have written this article, and was surprised to find himself thinking that if they had depended upon him, not merely the article from Spain but all the other aspects of the regime as well, from the least important to the most showy, would have been entirely different. In reality, he thought, there was practically nothing about the regime that he did not dislike profoundly; yet that was the path he had chosen and he must stick to it. He opened the paper again and skimmed over a few other news items, carefully avoiding patriotic or propagandist articles. Then at last he raised his eyes from the paper and looked round the room.

There was no one left but one old gentleman with a round white head and a ruddy face imprinted with an expression of mingled impudence, cupidity and cunning. Dressed in light colors, with a youthful, sport jacket with a slit at the back, heavy crepe-soled shoes and a gay tie, he assumed an air of being quite at home in the Ministry, walking up and down the room and calling out questions in a self-possessed, joking, impatient way to the obsequious ushers who stood at the doors. Then one of the doors opened and out came a bald, middle-aged man, thin except for a prominent paunch, with a drawn, yellow face, eyes buried deep in big, dark sockets, and a brisk, skeptical, witty expression on his sharp features. The old man went straight up to him with an exclamation of humorous protest, the other man greeted him in a ceremonious, deferential manner, and then the old man, with a confidential gesture, took hold of the yellow-faced man not by the arm but actually around the waist,

as if he had been a woman, and as he walked beside him across the room, he began speaking in a low, urgent whisper.

Marcello had followed the scene with an indifferent eye; then all of a sudden he realized to his surprise that he felt a crazy sort of hatred for the old man, for some reason unknown to himself. Marcello was aware that at any moment and for the most diverse reasons an excess of hatred of this kind might rise up to the dead surface of his accustomed apathy, unexpected as a monster emerging from a motionless sea; yet each time it happened he was astonished at coming face to face with an unknown aspect of his own character, which all its other aspects, so well-known and so secure, seemed to contradict. This old man, for instance—he felt he could kill him, or have him killed, with the greatest ease; in fact he wanted to kill him. And why? Perhaps it was because he saw skepticism, the fault he most hated, so plainly written upon that rubicund countenance. Or was it because his jacket had a slit at the back and the old man's hand in his pocket raised a flap of the material, thus revealing the hinder part of his too-limp and too-full pants and so gave the revolting impression of a dummy in a tailor shop window? Anyhow he hated him, and with an intensity so strong and so insufferable that he preferred, in the end, to lower his eyes and read the newspaper again. When he looked up again the old man and his companion had disappeared and the room was empty.

After a short time one of the ushers came and murmured to him that he could be received now, and Marcello rose and followed him. The usher opened one of the doors and showed him in. Marcello found himself in a spacious room with frescoed walls and ceiling, at the far end of which was a table covered with papers. Behind the table was sitting the yellow-faced man whom he had already seen in the other room; at the side sat another man whom Marcello knew well, his own immediate superior in the Secret Service. As Marcello came in the yellow-faced man, who was one of the Minister's secretaries, rose to his feet; the other man remained seated and greeted him with a nod. The latter, a thin old man of

military appearance, with a scarlet, wooden-looking face and a pair of mustaches of an improbable, mask-like blackness and bristliness, formed a complete contrast with the secretary. He was a loyal, rigid, honest man, accustomed to carrying out orders without discussion, putting what he considered to be his duty above everything, even above conscience; whereas the secretary, from what Marcello remembered hearing, was a man of a more recent and entirely different type—ambitious, skeptical, of social tastes, with a passion for intrigue that was carried to the point of cruelty, beyond all professional obligation and all limit of conscience. Marcello's whole preference was, naturally, for the old man, for the added reason that he thought he could discern, in that red and ravaged face, the same obscure melancholy that so often oppressed himself. Perhaps like him Colonel Baudino was aware of the contrast between a rigid, almost bewitched loyalty with nothing rational about it and the too often deplorable aspects of everyday reality. But perhaps, he thought again as he looked at the old man, perhaps it was only an illusion; perhaps he himself was, out of sympathy, endowing his superior with his own feelings in the hope of not being the only one to experience them.

The colonel, without looking either at Marcello or at the secretary, said drily, "This is Dr. Clerici about whom I spoke to you not long ago." The secretary, with a ceremonious, almost ironical promptitude, leaned across the table, held out his hand and invited him to be seated. Marcello sat down; the secretary sat down, took a box of cigarettes and offered it first to the colonel, who refused, and then to Marcello, who accepted. After he himself had also lit a cigarette, he said, "Clerici, I'm very pleased to make your acquaintance . . . The Colonel, here, never stops singing your praises . . . From all he says you seem to be an 'ace' as they call it." He underlined the words "as they call it" with a smile, and then went on: "We've gone carefully over your plan with the Minister and we judge it to be quite excellent . . . You know Quadri well?" "Yes," said Marcello, "he was my tutor at the University."

"And you're sure Quadri knows nothing of your official position?"

"I don't think so."

"Your idea of a faked political conversion with the object of inspiring confidence and getting inside their organization and even contriving to be entrusted with a job in Italy," went on the secretary, looking down at some notes in front of him on the table, "is a good one . . . The Minister, too, agrees that something of the kind should be tried without any delay . . . When would you feel inclined to start, Clerici?"

"As soon as required."

"Excellent," said the secretary, a little surprised, nevertheless, as if he had expected the answer to be different, "admirable . . . However there's one point that must be made clear . . . You're proposing to carry out a—let us say—rather delicate, dangerous mission . . . and we were saying, with the Colonel, that in order not to be conspicuous you ought to find, to think out, to invent some plausible pretext for your presence in Paris . . . I'm not saying that they'd know who you are or would be in a position to discover . . . but, in a word, you can't be too careful—all the more so since Quadri, as you tell us in your report, was perfectly well aware at one time of your feelings of loyalty towards the regime. . . ."

"If it hadn't been for those feelings," Marcello observed drily, "there couldn't have been my conversion either . . ."

"Of course, exactly . . . But one doesn't go to Paris on purpose to call at Quadri's and say to him, 'Here I am.' No, you must give the impression of happening to be in Paris for private reasons—nonpolitical reasons—and of taking advantage of this to tell Quadri all about your spiritual crisis . . . What you must do," concluded the secretary, looking up at Marcello, "is to combine your mission with something personal, something unofficial." The secretary turned toward the colonel and added, "Don't you think so, Colonel?"

"Yes, that's my opinion," said the colonel, raising his eyes. After a moment he went on, "Dr. Clerici can find the pretext that's needed."

Marcello bent his head, having no particular idea on the subject. It seemed to him that no answer could be made for the moment; since such a pretext required calm examination. He was on the point of replying, "Give me two or three days to think about it," when suddenly his tongue spoke for him almost against his will. "I'm getting married in a week's time . . . The mission could be combined with my honeymoon."

This time the secretary's surprise, though immediately covered by a prompt enthusiasm, was obvious and profound. The colonel, on the other hand, remained entirely passive, just as though Marcello had not spoken. "Excellent . . . admirable," exclaimed the secretary, looking rather disconcerted; "you're getting married . . . no better pretext could possibly be found . . . the classic Paris honeymoon."

"Yes," said Marcello without smiling, "the classic Paris honeymoon."

The secretary was afraid that he had offended him. What I meant was that Paris is just the right place for honeymoon . . . Of course I'm not married . . . but I was going to be, I think I should go to Paris too."

This time Marcello did not speak. It often happened that his answer to people he did not like took this form—complete silence. The secretary, in order to recover himself, turned to the colonel and said, "You're quite right, colonel . . . Only Dr. Clerici could have found such a pretext . . . We, even if we'd found it, couldn't have suggested it to him."

This remark, uttered in an ambiguous, half-serious tone of voice, could be taken, thought Marcello, in two ways. It could be meant as a real if slightly ironical praise, much as to say, "Devil take it, what fanaticism!"; or it could be the expression of a feeling of amazed contempt, What servility! He doesn't even respect his own marriage." Probably, he thought, it was both these things, since it was clear that in the case of the secretary himself the boundary between fanaticism and servility was not very precisely marked; both of them were means that he had to achieve the same ends. He noticed with satisfaction that the colonel, too, withheld from the secretary

the smile which the latter's double-edged remark seemed to be asking for. A moment's silence ensued. Marcello was now looking straight into the secretary's eyes with a fixity and a lack of timidity that he both knew and wished to be disconcerting. The secretary did not return his look, but, leaning with both hands on the top of the table, rose to his feet.

"All right, then . . . Colonel, will you and Dr. Clerici make all necessary arrangements about the practical details of the mission? . . . And you," he went on, turning towards Marcello, "I want you to understand that you have the full support of the Minister as well as mine . . . In fact," he added, with an affectation of casualness, "the Minister has expressed the wish to make your personal acquaintance."

Once again Marcello did not open his mouth; all he did was to rise to his feet and make a slight, deferential bow. The secretary, who was perhaps expecting some words of gratitude, again made a movement of surprise that he quickly repressed. "Wait a moment, Clerici . . . He told me to take you straight to him now."

The colonel rose and said, "Clerici, you know where to find me." He held out his hand to the secretary, but the latter insisted on accompanying him to the door with ceremonious, obsequious zeal. Marcello saw them shake hands, and then the colonel vanished and the secretary came back to him.

"Come along, Clerici," he said. "The Minister is extremely busy, but in spite of that he insists on seeing you in order to show how pleased he is with you . . . It's the first time, isn't it, that you've been taken in to see the Minister?" These words were spoken as they were crossing a small antechamber adjoining the secretary's room. The latter went to a door, opened it and disappeared, making a sign to him to wait, and then, almost immediately reappeared and invited him to follow.

Marcello entered the same long, narrow room that he had looked into not long before through the crack in the door, only now the room lay before him in breadth, with the table in front of him. Behind the table was sitting the man with the broad, massive face and plump figure that

he had peeped in upon as the Minister was allowing himself to be kissed by the woman in the big black hat. Marcello noticed that the table was quite bare, polished like a mirror, with no papers on it, only a large bronzed inkpot and a closed portfolio of dark-colored leather. "Excellency, this is Dr. Clerici," said the secretary.

The Minister rose and held out his hand to Marcello with a zealous cordiality even more conspicuous than that of the secretary, but entirely lacking in pleasantness in fact decidedly commanding. "How are you, Clerici?" He pronounced his words slowly and with care, haughtily, as though they contained some special meaning. "I hear you spoken of in the highest terms . . . The region has need of men like you." The Minister sat down again, took his handkerchief out of his pocket and blew his nose, at the same time examining certain papers that the secretary laid before him. Marcello retired discreetly toward the farthest corner of the room. The Minister looked at the papers while the secretary whispered in his ear, then he looked at his handkerchief, and Marcello saw that the white linen was stained with scarlet. He remembered that as he had come into the room the Minister's mouth had looked to him unnaturally red—with lipstick from the woman in the black hat. Still examining the papers that the secretary was showing him, displaying no embarrassment, no concern at being observed, the Minister started vigorously rubbing his mouth with his handkerchief, looking at it every now and then to see if the lipstick was still coming off. At last his examination of the papers and of the handkerchief came to a simultaneous end, and the Minister rose to his feet and again held out his hand to Marcello. "Good-bye, Clerici," he said; "as my secretary will have already told you, the mission you are undertaking has my complete and unqualified support."

Marcello bowed, grasped the thick, square hand, and followed the secretary out of the room.

They went back to the secretary's room. The latter put down on the table the papers that had been examined by the Minister and then accompanied Marcello to the door. "Well then, Clerici, into the lion's mouth!" he said wi-

a smile, "and best wishes for your marriage." Marcello thanked him with a nod and a bow and a murmured phrase. The secretary, with a last smile, shook his hand. Then the door closed.

CHAPTER 5

IT WAS late now and, as soon as he came out of the Ministry, Marcello hastened his step. He took his place in the line at the bus stop, in the midst of the hungry, irritable midday crowd, and patiently awaited his turn to get on to the already crowded vehicle. He accomplished part of his journey hanging on outside, on the step, then with a great effort managed to squeeze himself onto the platform; and there he remained, hemmed in on every side by other passengers, while the bus, jolting and roaring, climbed up the steep streets running from the center of the town to the suburbs.

These discomforts did not worry him; in fact he found them helpful to him, inasmuch as they were shared with so many others and contributed, if only in a small degree, to make him like everybody else. Besides, contacts with a crowd, however disagreeable and inconvenient, pleased him and always seemed to him preferable to contacts with individuals. From a crowd, he thought, raising himself on tiptoe to breathe more freely, from a crowd he derived the comforting feeling of many-sided fellowship, whether it was a matter of cramming oneself into a bus or of patriotic enthusiasm at political meetings; whereas from individuals he derived nothing but doubts, both about himself and about others—which was what had happened that morning during his visit to the Ministry.

Why, for instance, why, the moment after he had offered to combine his mission with his honeymoon, had he experienced that painful feeling of having performed an act either of gratuitous servility or of clumsy clumsiness? Because, he told himself, the offer

o that skeptical, designing, corrupt man, that despicable, odious secretary. It was he who, by his mere presence, had inspired in him a sense of shame for an act which had in reality been profoundly spontaneous and disinterested. And now, while the bus rolled on from one stop to another, he excused himself by saying that he would not have had a sense of shame if he had not found himself face to face with a man like that, a man for whom neither loyalty nor devotion nor sacrifice existed, but only calculation, discretion, self-interest. His offer had not sprung from any mental speculation but from the obscure depths of his spirit—a sure proof, apart from anything else, of the authentic nature of his absorption into social and political normality. Another man—the secretary, for instance—would only have made such an offer after long and careful calculation; he had made it on the spur of the moment. As for the impropriety of combining his honeymoon with a political mission, it was not worth wasting time even in thinking about it. He was what he was, and all that he did was right if it was governed by what he was.

With these thoughts in his mind he got off the bus and walked along the street of this quarter where minor officials lived, on a pavement bordered with white and pink oleanders. The great doorways of massive, shabby blocks of flats occupied by government officials opened on to this pavement, and through them one could see vast, dreary courtyards. Alternating with the doorways was a series of modest shops that Marcello knew well—the tobacconist, the baker, the grocer, the butcher, the druggist. It was midday and there were many revealing signs, even in these humble concerns, of the mild and transitory gaiety that comes with the breaking-off of work and the family gathering—smells of cooking coming from half-closed windows on the ground floor; badly dressed men hurrying into doorways, almost at a run; voices on the radio and the sound of a phonograph. From a little enclosed garden in a recess of one of the buildings an espalier of climbing roses on the railings greeted him with a wave of sharp, dusty fragrance. Marcello quickened his step and went in at the doorway marked 19,

together with two or three other officials—and imitating their haste, not without satisfaction—started to walk up the stairs.

He went slowly up the broad stairs, where dreary twilight alternated with sumptuous light from big windows on the landings. But at the second floor he remembered that he had forgotten something—the flowers he never failed to bring to his fiancée each time he was invited to lunch at her home. Glad that he remembered in time, he ran down the stairs again, went out into the street and walked straight to the corner of the building, where a woman squatted on a stool with a few jars of seasonal flowers in front of her. He hurriedly selected half a dozen roses, the best the flower seller had, tall and straight-stalked, dark red in color, and, holding them to his nose to breathe their perfume, went back into the building and upstairs, this time to the top floor. Here, there was only one door on the landing, and a smaller staircase led up to a little rustic door, underneath which a brilliant light shone from an open terrace. He rang the bell, thinking, "Let's hope her mother doesn't come and open the door to me." For his future mother-in-law displayed an almost doting love for him that embarrassed him profoundly.

A moment later the door opened and Marcello was relieved to see in the dim light of the hall the figure of the little servant girl—almost a child—bunched up in a white apron much too big for her, her pale face crowned by a double coil of black plaits. She shut the door again, but not before she had stuck her head out for a moment to peer inquisitively onto the landing; while Marcello, breathing in the strong smell of cooking that filled the air, went through into the drawing room.

The window of this room was almost closed, to keep out the heat and light, but it was still possible in the dimness to distinguish the dark, sham-Renaissance furniture that cumbered it. They were massive pieces, severe, heavily carved, and they made a curious contrast with the ornaments scattered about the room on brackets and on the small table, all of them in a coquettish but rather out-of-date taste—a little nude woman kneeling on the edge of an ash tray, a blue pottery sailor playing the

rdion, a group of white and black dogs, two or three shaped like buds or flowers. There were many articles made of metal or china which originally, Marcello had contained wedding sweetmeats from friends and relations of his fiancée. The walls were hung with reproduction damask, and bright-colored landscapes and life paintings in black frames were hung upon them. Marcello sat down on the sofa, already clothed in its usual covering, and looked round with satisfaction. It was a real middle-class home, he reflected once again, the one of a middle-class family of the most conventional and most modest type, similar in every way to others in this same building, in this same quarter, and it was for him its most pleasing aspect—the sensation of finding himself face to face with something absolutely ordinary, almost common, and yet completely reassuring. He was aware of an almost abject feeling of complacency at the ugliness of the house. He himself had grown up in a pretty house where everything was in good taste, and he realized that everything that surrounded him at this moment was hopelessly ugly; but it was just this that he needed, this perfectly anonymous ugliness, as a further means of bringing him into line with his equals.

He remembered that for lack of money—anyhow for the next few years—the two of them, Giulia and he, would have to live in this house after they were married, and he most blessed their poverty. By himself, following his own taste, he would never have been capable of making his home look so ugly and so ordinary. Quite soon, then, this room would be his own sitting room; just as the "art nouveau" bedroom, in which his future mother-in-law and her late husband had slept for thirty years, would be his bedroom, and the mahogany dining room in which Giulia and her parents had eaten their meals twice a day for the whole of their lives would be his dining room. Giulia's father had been an important official in one of the ministries, and this home of his, furnished according to the taste of the period when he was young, was a kind of temple elevated in rather a touching manner in honor of the twin divinities of respectability and normality.

Soon, he thought, with a joy that was almost greedy, almost lascivious yet at the same time melancholy, soon he would be absorbed rightfully into this normality and this respectability.

The door opened and Giulia came rushing in, talking to someone in the passage, perhaps the maid. When she had finished talking she closed the door and hurried over to her fiancé. Giulia, at twenty, was as handsomely developed as a woman of thirty, with a slightly coarse, almost vulgar yet fresh and solid handsomeness that showed her youthfulness and also gave an indefinable impression of a capacity for sensual self-deception and enjoyment. She had a very white skin, large eyes of a dark and languid clearness, thick, wavy chestnut hair and full, red lips. Marcello, as he saw her coming toward him in a light, tailormade suit through which the curves of her exuberant figure seemed to be bursting, could not help thinking with renewed satisfaction that he was marrying a really normal, ordinary girl, very similar to the drawing room that had just given him such a feeling of relief. And the same feeling of relief and comfort came over him when he heard once again her drawling, good-natured voice with its local accent saying: "What lovely roses! . . . But why? I've already told you you mustn't bother . . . It's not as if it was the first time you were coming to lunch with us." As she spoke, she walked across and put the roses into a blue vase that stood on a yellow marble column in a corner of the room.

"I like to bring you flowers," said Marcello.

Giulia gave a sigh of satisfaction and plumped down on the sofa beside him. Marcello looked at her and noticed that a sudden embarrassment—unmistakable sign of incipient excitement—had taken the place of the impulsive self-possession of a moment before. Then, all at once, she turned toward him and, throwing her arms round his neck, murmured, "Give me a kiss."

Marcello put his arm round her waist and kissed her on the mouth. Giulia was of a sensual nature, and in these kisses—which were almost always demanded by her from a reluctant Marcello—there came invariably a mo-

ment when this sensuality of hers crept in in an aggressive manner and altered the chaste, pre-ordained character of their relations as an engaged couple. This time again, when their lips were on the point of separating, she seemed to be carried away by a violent onslaught of desire, and throwing her arm suddenly round Marcello's neck, pressed her mouth once more fiercely against his. He felt her tongue work its way between his lips and then move rapidly round, twisting and turning inside his mouth. Meanwhile she had seized his hand and was holding it against her body, guiding it until it lay clasping his left breast. At the same time she was blowing through his nostrils and breathing hard, with an innocent, unsatisfied, animal sound.

Marcello was not in love with his future wife; but he liked Giulia and these sensual embraces never failed to excite him. But he did not feel inclined to reciprocate her transports; he wished his relations with his fiancée to be kept within the bounds of tradition, feeling that a great intimacy would reintroduce into his life the disorder, the abnormality that he was all the time seeking to banish. After a moment he took his hand away from her breast and very gently pushed her away. "Oh, how cold you are!" said Giulia, withdrawing from him and looking at him with a smile. "Really there are times when I think you aren't fond of me at all."

"You know I'm fond of you," said Marcello.

She went on talking volubly. "I'm so pleased when you say that," she said. "I've never been so happy . . . In the way, d'you know, just this morning Mummy was insisting that we must have her bedroom . . . She'll go into that little room at the end of the passage . . . What d'you think about it? . . . Ought we to accept?"

"I think," said Marcello, "that she wouldn't like it if we refused."

"That's what I think too . . . Just fancy, when I was a little girl I used to dream of sleeping one day in a room like that . . . Now I don't know whether I like it so much . . . D'you like it?" she asked, in a doubtful and at the same time complacent tone of voice, as if she were

afraid of his criticism of her taste and also anxious to have it approved.

Marcello hastened to reply: "I like it very much . . . It's a lovely room!" And he saw that these words aroused a visible satisfaction in Giulia.

Delighted, she planted a kiss on his cheek and went on. "This morning I ran into Signora Persico . . . I invited her to the reception . . . D'you know, she didn't know I was getting married? . . . She asked me such a lot of questions . . . When I told her who you were, she told me she knew your mother . . . She met her at the seaside some years ago."

Marcello said nothing. It was always highly disagreeable to him to talk about his mother, with whom he had not lived for years and whom he rarely saw. Giulia, unaware of his embarrassment, went on chattering and again changed the subject. "Now, about the reception . . . We've made out a list of people to be invited . . . Would you like to see it?"

"Yes, let me see it."

She drew a sheet of paper out of her pocket and handed it to him. Marcello took it and looked at it. It was a long list of names, grouped by families—fathers, mothers, daughters, sons. Then men were indicated not only by their Christian names and surnames but by their professional designations as well—doctors, lawyers, engineers, professors; and, if they had them, by their titles too—*Commendatore*, *Grande Ufficiale*, *Cavaliere*. Beside each family Giulia, to be on the safe side, had written down the number of persons that composed it—three, five, two, four. Almost all the names were unknown to Marcello, yet he felt he had known them for a long time. They were all essentially middle-class people, in the professions or the civil service, people who had homes exactly like this one, with drawing rooms like this and furniture like this; and they had marriageable daughters very like Giulia, whom they married off to young officials with doctor's degrees very similar, he hoped, to himself. He examined the long list, pausing at some of the most characteristic,

ordinary names, with a profound satisfaction tinged with his usual cold, settled melancholy. "Now who, for instance, is Arcangeli?" he could not help asking, taking a name at random. "Commendatore Giuseppe Arcangeli, with his wife Iole, his daughters Cilvana and Beatrice and his son Dr. Gino?"

"Never mind, you don't know them . . . Arcangeli was a friend of poor Daddy's at the Ministry."

"Where does he live?"

"Two steps from here, in Via Porpora."

"And what's his drawing room like?"

"You do ask the funniest questions, you know," she exclaimed with a laugh. "Why, what d'you expect it to be like? It's a room just like this one and like lots of others too . . . Why does it interest you so much to know what the Arcangeli's drawing-room is like?"

"And the daughters, are they engaged to be married?"

"Yes, Beatrice is . . . But why . . . ?"

"What's her fiancé like?"

"Well really—you even want to know about him! Well, he's got an odd name, Schirinzi, and he works in a lawyer's office."

Marcello noted that no inferences of any kind as to the nature of her guests could be deduced from Giulia's answers. Probably they had no more character in her mind than they had on the piece of paper: they were simply names of respectable, indistinguishable, normal people. He ran his eye down the list again and stopped at random at another name. "And who is Dr. Cesare Spadoni, with his wife Livia and his lawyer brother Tullio?"

"He's a children's doctor . . . His wife was at school with me. You may have met her—very attractive, dark, small, pale . . . He's a good-looking young man, clever too, and well-bred . . . The brother's good-looking too . . . They're twins."

"And Cavaliere Luigi Pace and his wife Teresa and his four sons, Maurizio, Giovanni, Vittorio and Riccardo?"

"Another of poor Daddy's friends . . . The sons are all students . . . Riccardo's still at school."

Marcello saw that it was useless to go on asking for information about the people on the list. Giulia would not be able to tell him much more than could be told from the list itself. Besides, he thought, even if she gave him minute information about the characters and the lives of these people, that information would necessarily be confined within the extremely narrow limits of her own judgment and intelligence. But he was conscious of an almost voluptuous contentment—even though its voluptuous quality had no joy in it—at being able, thanks to his marriage, to enter into and become a part of this extremely ordinary society. But there was still one question on the tip of his tongue, and after a moment's hesitation he decided to put it to her: "Now tell me—am I like these guests of yours?"

"How d'you mean—physically?"

"No . . . what I want to know is whether in your opinion I have any points of resemblance with them—in manner, in look, in general appearance . . . in fact, whether I'm like them."

"For me, you're better than anyone else," she answered impetuously. "But apart from that—yes—you *are* the same sort of person . . . You're well-bred, serious-minded, clever . . . in fact, one can see that, like them, you're a good, honest person . . . But why d'you ask me that question?"

"Never mind."

"How strange you are," she said, looking at him with a kind of curiosity; "most people want to be different from everyone else . . . but you're just the opposite; anyone would think you wanted to be *like* everyone else."

Marcello said nothing, but handed the list back to her, remarking in an offhand manner, "Anyhow I don't know a single one of them."

"Well, d'you think I know them all?" said Giulia gaily. "With lots of them, it's only Mummy who knows even who they are . . . Besides, the reception is all over in a minute . . . just an hour or so, and then you'll never see them again."

"I don't mind seeing them," said Marcello.

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"And Cavaliere Luigi Pace and his wife Teresa and his four sons, Maurizio, Giovanni, Vittorio and Riccardo?"

"Another of poor Daddy's friends . . . The sons are all students . . . Riccardo's still at school."

Marcello saw that it was useless to go on asking for information about the people on the list. Giulia would not be able to tell him much more than could be told from the list itself. Besides, he thought, even if she gave him minute information about the characters and the lives of these people, that information would necessarily be confined within the extremely narrow limits of her own judgment and intelligence. But he was conscious of an almost voluptuous contentment—even though its voluptuous quality had no joy in it—at being able, thanks to his marriage, to enter into and become a part of this extremely ordinary society. But there was still one question on the tip of his tongue, and after a moment's hesitation he decided to put it to her: "Now tell me—am I like these guests of yours?"

"How d'you mean—physically?"

"No . . . what I want to know is whether in your opinion I have any points of resemblance with them—in manner, in look, in general appearance . . . in fact, whether I'm like them."

"For me, you're better than anyone else," she answered impetuously. "But apart from that—yes—you *are* the same sort of person . . . You're well-bred, serious-minded, clever . . . in fact, one can see that, like them, you're a good, honest person . . . But why d'you ask me that question?"

"Never mind."

"How strange you are," she said, looking at him with a kind of curiosity; "most people want to be different from everyone else . . . but you're just the opposite; anyone would think you wanted to be *like* everyone else."

Marcello said nothing, but handed the list back to her, remarking in an offhand manner, "Anyhow I don't know a single one of them."

"Well, d'you think I know them all?" said Giulia gaily. "With lots of them, it's only Mummy who knows even who they are . . . Besides, the reception is all over in a minute . . . just an hour or so, and then you'll never see them again."

"I don't mind seeing them," said Marcello.

"I was only talking," said Giulia. "Now listen to the menu the hotel's suggested and tell me if you approve." Giulia took another piece of paper from her pocket and read aloud:

Consommé froid
Filets de Sole Meunière
Dinde au riz, sauce suprême
Salade de saison
Fromages assortis
Glace diplomatique
Fruits
Café et liqueurs

"What d'you think of it?" she asked, in the same doubtful but complacent tone in which, a short time before, she had spoken of her mother's bedroom; "d'you think it's all right? D'you think they'll have enough to eat?"

"I think it's excellent, and plenty of it too," said Marcello.

Giulia went on: "About the champagne—we chose Italian champagne . . . It's not so good as French, but for drinking toasts it's perfectly all right." She was silent for a moment, and then went on in her usual voluble way, "You know what Father Lattanzi said? That if you want to get married you must receive communion and if you want to receive communion you must go to confession . . . otherwise he won't marry us."

For a moment Marcello, taken by surprise, did not know what to say. He was not a believer and it was perhaps ten years since he had been to church. Besides, he had always been convinced that he felt a decided antipathy toward all things ecclesiastical. Now he realized to his astonishment that far from being annoyed by it, this idea of confession and communion was pleasing and attractive to him, in the same way that he was pleased and attracted by the wedding reception, by all those guests that he did not know, by his marriage to Giulia, and by Giulia, herself who was so ordinary and like so many other girls. It was a further link, he thought, in the chain of normality by which he was seeking to anchor himself in the shifting sands of life; and in addition this link was

made of a more noble, a more resistant, metal than the others—religion. He was almost surprised at not having thought of it before, and attributed this forgetfulness to the obvious, easy-going character of the religion in which he had been born and to which he had always seemed to belong, even without practicing it. Curious to know how Giulia would answer, he said, "But I'm not a believer."

"Who is?" she replied calmly. "D'you think ninety per cent of the people who go to church believe in it? And the priests themselves?"

"But *you* believe?"

Giulia waved her hand in the air. "Well, well," she said, "up to a point . . . Every now and then I say to Father Lattanzi, You don't bewitch *me* with all your stories, you priests . . . I believe them and I don't believe them . . . Or rather," she added punctiliously, "let's say that I have a religion all of my own . . . different from the religion of the priests."

What does she mean by a religion of her own, wondered Marcello. But knowing by experience that Giulia often spoke without knowing very well what she was saying, he did not press the point. Instead, he said, "My case is more serious . . . I don't believe at all, and I haven't any religion."

Giulia waved her hand gaily and indifferently. "But what does it mean to you? . . . You must go . . . It means so much to them, and it doesn't cost you anything."

"I daresay, but I shall be forced to tell a lie."

"Mere words . . . Besides, it'll be a lie for a good purpose . . . You know what Father Lattanzi says?—that you must do certain things just as if you believed, even if you don't believe . . . Faith comes afterwards."

Marcello was silent for a moment, and then said; "All right . . . I'll go to confession and then have communion." And as he spoke he was again conscious of the same thrill of slightly gloomy pleasure that the list of guests had inspired in him a little earlier. "I'll go and make my confession to Father Lattanzi," he added.

"There's no necessity for you to go to him," said Giulia; "you can go to any confessor, in any church, just like."

"And how about communion?"

"Father Lattanzi will administer it the same day we get married . . . we go together . . . How long is it since you confessed?"

"Well . . . I don't think I've confessed since my first communion—when I was eight," said Marcello, rather embarrassed, "never since then."

"Just think!" she exclaimed joyfully, "what a tremendous number of sins you'll have to tell them about!"

"Supposing they won't give me absolution?"

"They'll give you absolution all right," she answered affectionately, stroking his face. "In any case, what sins can you have to confess? You're good and kind and you've never done anyone any harm . . . They'll give you absolution at once."

"It's a complicated business, getting married," said Marcello casually.

"But I love all these complications and preparation," said Giulia. "After all, we've got to stay together all the rest of our lives, haven't we? . . . Oh, by the way, when are we going to decide about the honeymoon?"

For the first time Marcello was aware of a feeling almost of pity for Giulia, apart from his usual indulgent, straightforward affection for her. He knew that there was no time for him to draw back and, instead of going to Paris where he had his mission to fulfill, go somewhere else to spend their honeymoon. He could tell them, at the Ministry, that he refused the job. But at the same time he realized that this was impossible. The mission was the most resolute, the most compromising, the most decisive step on the road toward absolute and final normality; just as his marriage with Giulia, the wedding reception, religious ceremonies, confession and communion were all steps in the same direction, although, in his eyes, of less importance.

He did not pause more than a moment to analyze this thought, whose dark, almost sinister background did not escape him, but answered hurriedly: "I thought that at all we might go to Paris."

Giulia, crazy with delight, clapped her hands and exclaimed: "Ah, how wonderful! . . . Paris . . . my dream!" She threw her arms round his neck and kissed him.

lently. "If you knew how pleased I am! But I didn't want to tell you how I was longing to go to Paris . . . I was afraid it might cost too much."

"One way and another, it'll cost about the same as other places," said Marcello. "But don't worry about the money . . . we'll manage all right this time."

Giulia was in transports of delight. "Oh, how pleased I am!" she repeated. She pressed herself violently against Marcello and murmured: "D'you love me? Why don't you give me a kiss?" And so, once again, Marcello found himself with her arms around his neck and her lips against his. This time the ardor of her kiss seemed redoubled by gratitude. Giulia sighed, she twisted her whole body about, she squeezed Marcello's hand against her breast, she rolled her tongue rapidly and spasmodically inside his mouth. Marcello felt himself becoming excited, and thought, now, this minute, if I wanted to, I could have her, here, on this sofa; and he seemed to be aware, once more, of the fragility of what he called normality. At last they separated, and Marcello said with a smile: "It's lucky we're getting married soon . . . otherwise I'm afraid we'd become lovers, one of these days."

Giulia, still flushed from the kiss, shrugged her shoulders and answered with a kind of exalted, ingenuous shamelessness: "I love you so much . . . I'd ask nothing better."

"Truly?" asked Marcello.

"Yes, this minute," she said boldly, "here, now . . ." She had taken Marcello's hand and was slowly kissing it, looking up at him with shining, impassioned eyes. Then the door opened and she drew back. Giulia's mother came in.

She too, thought Marcello as he watched her approaching, was one of the large number of characters introduced into his life by his quest for a redeeming normality. There could be nothing in common between him and this sentimental woman, always overflowing with melting tenderness—nothing except his desire to tie himself firmly and lastingly to a human society that was solid and well-established. Giulia's mother, Signora Delia Ginami, was a corpulent lady in whom the slackening processes of mature age appeared to manifest themselves in a sort of dis-

integration not only of the body but of the mind, the former being afflicted with a quivering, boneless obesity, the latter with a tendency towards the languors of a kindness that was partly natural to her and partly affected. With every step she took, beneath her shapeless clothes whole portions of her swollen body appeared to be heeling over and shifting on their own account, and the slightest trifle was enough to provoke an agonizing emotional disturbance that overcame her powers of control, filling her watery blue eyes with tears, causing her to wring her hands in attitudes of ecstasy. During this period, the imminent marriage of her only daughter had plunged Signora Delia into a condition of perpetual sensibility. She was always weeping—with contentment, as she explained—and she felt, constantly a need to embrace Giulia or her future son-in-law, for whom, she said, she already felt as much affection as if he were her own son. Marcello, filled with embarrassment by these effusions, understood nevertheless that they were merely one aspect of the reality into which he wanted to be absorbed, and such he endured and appreciated them with the same rather somber satisfaction as was inspired in him by the gaily furnished furniture in the house, by Giulia's conversation, by the wedding celebrations and the ritual demands of Father Lattanzi.

At this moment, however, Signora Delia was in a state not so much of tenderness as of indignation. She was waving a sheet of paper and, after greeting Marcello who had risen to his feet, said, "An anonymous letter . . . but let's go to the other room . . . it's ready."

"An anonymous letter?" cried Giulia, rushing after her mother.

"Yes, an anonymous letter . . . How disgusting people are!"

Marcello followed them into the dining room, trying to hide his face behind his handkerchief. The news of the anonymous letter seriously disturbed him, and he was determined not to let the two women see it. To hear Giulia's mother exclaim, "An anonymous letter," and immediately to think, "Someone has written about the Lino affair," were for him one and the same thing. The blood

had left his face, he had caught his breath and had been overwhelmed by a feeling of consternation, of shame and of fear, inexplicable, unexpected, shattering, a feeling such as he had never known except in the first years of adolescence when the memory of Lino was still fresh. It had been too strong for him; and all his powers of control had been swept away in an instant, just as a thin cord of policemen might be swept away by the panic-stricken crowd it is supposed to hold back. As he approached the table he bit his lip till it bled. He had been wrong, then, when he had looked up the notice of the crime at the library and had been convinced that the old wound was completely healed; not merely was the wound not healed but it was far deeper than he had suspected. Luckily his place at the head of the table was against the light, with his back to the window. Stiffly and in silence he sat down with Giulia on his right and Signora Ginami on his left.

The anonymous letter now lay on the tablecloth beside Giulia's mother's plate. The little servant girl had come in, holding in both hands a large dish of spaghetti. Marcello plunged the fork into the red, greasy tangle and lifted a small quantity of it on to his own plate. Immediately the two women began to protest. "Not nearly enough . . . you're trying to starve yourself . . . do take some more." And Signora Ginami added, "You work hard, you must eat." And Giulia impulsively took some more of the spaghetti from the dish and put it on her fiancé's plate.

"I'm not hungry," said Marcello, in a voice that seemed to him absurdly exhausted and distressed.

"Appetite comes with eating," replied Giulia emphatically helping herself.

The maid went out, carrying away the almost empty dish, and Giulia's mother said at once, "I didn't really mean to show it . . . It didn't seem to me worth while . . . But what a world we live in!"

Marcello said nothing; he bent his face over his plate and filled his mouth with spaghetti. He still feared that the letter was concerned with the Lino affair, although his reason told him that this was impossible. But it was an uncontrollable fear, a fear more powerful than any

reflection. Giulia asked, "But surely, mayn't we know what the letter's about?"

Her mother answered, "First of all I want to tell Marcello that, as far as I am concerned, even if the letter contained things a thousand times worse, he can still be sure that my affection for him remains unchanged . . . Marcello, you're a real son to me, and you know that a mother's love for a son is stronger than any insinuation." Her eyes filled with tears, she repeated, "A real son," and seizing Marcello's hand, she carried it to her heart, saying, "Dear Marcello!" Not knowing what to do or say, Marcello sat motionless and silent, waiting for the effusion to finish. Signora Ginami gazed at him with tenderness in her eyes and then added, "You must forgive an old woman like me, Marcello."

"Don't be absurd, Mummy; you're not old," said Giulia, too well accustomed to these emotional disturbances on her mother's part to attach importance to them or to be surprised.

"Yes, I'm an old woman, I've only a few more years to live," replied Signora Delia. Imminent death was one of her favorite subjects of conversation, for it was not only a moving subject to her, but she thought, perhaps, that it also had the power to move others. "I shall die soon," she went on, "and that's why I'm so very, very pleased to be leaving my daughter in the charge of such a good man, Marcello."

Marcello—who, with his hand held firmly against her heart by Signora Delia, was forced into a most uncomfortable position over the top of his plate of spaghetti—could not repress a very slight movement of impatience that did not escape the old woman. She mistook it for a protest against what he considered to be excessive praise. "Yes, it's true," she repeated; "you *are* good . . . you are so good . . . Sometimes I say to Giulia, 'You're a lucky girl to have found such a good young man.' I know quite well, Marcello, that goodness is out of fashion nowadays . . . but you must allow someone who's many years older than you to say it—nothing in the world matters except goodness . . . And you, luckily, you are so very, very, very good."

an have something to eat," exclaimed Giulia, "don't you see you're dirtying his sleeve in the gravy?"

Signora Ginami let go Marcello's hand, and taking up the letter, said, "It's a typewritten letter . . . with a some postmark . . . I shouldn't be surprised, Marcello, one of your colleagues at the office hadn't written it."

"But, Mummy, once and for all, mayn't we know what's it?"

"Here it is," said her mother, handing the letter to Giulia. "Read it . . . but don't read it aloud . . . There are nasty things in it that I don't want to hear . . . Then, when you've read it, give it to Marcello."

Not without some anxiety, Marcello watched his fiancée read the letter. Then, twisting her mouth in scorn, "How disgusting!" Giulia pronounced, and handed it to him. The letter, written on thin typewriter paper, contained only a few lines in the faint ink of a worn-out ribbon. Signora, in allowing your daughter to marry Dr. Clerici, you are committing something worse than an error, you are committing a crime. Dr. Clerici's father has for years been shut up in a lunatic asylum, with a form of madness which is of syphilitic origin; and, as you know, this malady is hereditary. There is still time; stop the marriage. A friend."

"So that's all," thought Marcello, almost disappointed. He seemed to be aware that his disappointment was greater than his relief. It was as if he had been hoping that someone else might share the knowledge of the tragedy of his childhood and so might free him, in part, from the burden of that knowledge. There was one phrase, nevertheless, that struck him: "As you know, this malady is hereditary." He knew perfectly well that the origin of his father's madness was not syphilitic, and that there was no danger of his going mad, some day, in the way his father had done. And yet that phrase, in all its threatening malignity, seemed to him to allude to some other form of madness that might really be hereditary. This idea was immediately dismissed, no more than touched the surface of his mind. Then he handed back the letter to his mother, saying calmly, "There's no truth."

"I know there's no truth in it," answered the good lady, almost offended. After a moment she went on, "I only know that my daughter is marrying a man who is good, intelligent, honest, serious minded . . . and good-looking too," she added coquettishly.

"Quite particularly good-looking: you needn't be shy about saying so," Giulia confirmed, "and that's why whoever wrote the letter insinuates that he's tainted . . . Seeing him so good-looking, he can't believe that there isn't some hidden worm . . . Brutes . . ."

"I wonder what they would say," Marcello could not help thinking, "if they knew that at the age of thirteen I very nearly had sexual relations with a man, and that I killed him." He noticed, now that the fear aroused by the letter had passed, the usual melancholy, speculative pathy had again come over him. "Probably," he thought, looking at his fiancée and at Signora Ginami, "probably it wouldn't make much impression on them . . . Normal people have thick skins"; and he realized that he was envying the two women for their "thick skins."

All of a sudden he said, "I've got to go and see my father today."

"Are you going with your mother?"

"Yes."

The spaghetti was finished: the little servant girl came in again, changed the plates and put down a dish filled with meat and vegetables on the table. As soon as she had left the room, Giulia's mother took up the letter again and, examining it, said, "I should just like to know who wrote that letter."

"Mummy," said Giulia all at once, with a sudden, excessive seriousness, "give me that letter a minute."

She took the envelope, looked at it carefully, then extracted the thin sheet of paper, scrutinized it, frowning, and finally exclaimed in a loud, indignant voice, "I know perfectly well who wrote this letter . . . there can't be any doubt about it . . . Oh, what an infamous thing!"

"Who was it then?"

"An unfortunate wretch," replied Giulia, looking down at the table.

Marcello said nothing. Giulia worked as a secretary in a lawyer's office, and probably the letter had been written by one of the clerks there. "No doubt some envious son," said her mother. "Marcello, at thirty, has a position that many older men would like to have."

Although his curiosity was not aroused, Marcello asked his fiancée, as a matter of form, "If you know the name of the person who wrote the letter, why don't you tell me?"

"I can't," she answered, more thoughtful now, than dignified. "But I've told you, he's an unfortunate wretch." She gave the letter back to her mother and helped her clear the table from the dish that the maid handed to her.

For a moment none of the three spoke. Then Giulia's mother began again, in a tone of sincere incredulity, "I don't know what to think, yet I can't believe that there can be anyone so bad as to be able to write such a letter about a man like Marcello."

"Not everybody loves him as we do, Mummy," said Giulia.

"But who," her mother burst out with great emphasis, "who could help loving our dear Marcello?"

"You know what Mummy says about you?" asked Giulia, who seemed now to have returned to her usual gaiety and volubility, "—that you're not a man but an angel. And so I suppose one of these days, instead of coming into the house by the door, you'll fly in by the window." She suppressed a burst of laughter and went on: "It's a great pleasure to the priest when you go to confession to know that you're an angel . . . It isn't every day that he listens to the confession of an angel."

"Now you're making fun of me, as usual," said her mother; "but I'm not exaggerating in the least . . . I mean, Marcello is an angel." She looked at Marcello with intense and sugary tenderness, and her eyes began to fill with tears. She added, after a moment, "In all my life I have known only one man who was as good as Marcello—that was your father, Giulia."

Giulia now put on a serious look, as though to devote herself to the subject, and looked down at her plate. Her mother's face was undergoing a gradual transformation; an abundance of tears overflowed from her eyes, and her pathetic grimace distorted the soft, puffy features.

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the stray locks of her loosened hair, so that colors and lineaments appeared confused and dimmed, as though seen through a sheet of glass streaming with water. Hurriedly she searched for her handkerchief, and holding it to her eyes, stammered: "A truly good man . . . truly an angel . . . and we were so happy together, we three . . . and now he's dead he's not here any more. . . . Marcello reminds me of your father, with his goodness, and that's why I'm so very fond of him. . . . When I think that that man who was so good is dead, my heart breaks." he last words were lost in the handkerchief.

Giulia said calmly, "Have something to eat, Mummy."

"No, no, I'm not hungry," sobbed her mother. "You must forgive me, you two. . . . You're happy, and happiness must not be spoiled by the sorrow of an old woman." She rose hastily and went out of the room.

"Just think, it's six years ago," said Giulia, looking at the door, "and yet it's still just as if it was the first day."

Marcello said nothing. He had lit a cigarette and was smoking with bent head. Giulia put out her hand and took his. "What are you thinking about?" she asked, almost beseechingly.

Giulia often asked him what he was thinking about, for he was often filled with curiosity and even alarm by the serious, reserved expression on his face. Marcello answered, "I was thinking about your mother. . . . Her compliments embarrass me. . . . She doesn't know me well enough to say that I'm good."

Giulia squeezed his hand and replied, "She doesn't say it just as a compliment. . . . Even when you're not here, she often says to me, 'How good Marcello is!'"

"But what does *she* know about it?"

"There are some things that can be seen." Giulia rose and stood beside him, pressing her rounded hip against his shoulder and passing her hand through his hair. "But why? Don't you want people to think you're good?"

"I don't mean that," answered Marcello. "I mean that may not be true."

She shook her head. "Your trouble is that you're too modest. . . . Now listen—I'm not like Mummy who tries to make out that everyone is good. . . . For me there are

od people and bad people. . . . Well, to me, you're one of the best people I've ever met in my life . . . and I don't say that because we're engaged and because I love you . . . I say it because it's true."

"But what, exactly, does this goodness consist in?"

"I've told you. There are some things that can be seen . . . Why does one say that a woman is beautiful? . . . Because one *sees* that she is . . . and one sees that you are good."

"Well, so be it," said Marcello, with bowed head. The conviction of the two women that he was good was new to him, but he always found it profoundly disconcerting. In what did this goodness consist? Was he truly good? Was it not rather that the thing which Giulia and her mother called goodness was really his abnormality, in fact his detachment, his remoteness from ordinary life? Normal men were not good, he went on to think, for abnormality must always be paid for, whether consciously or not, at a high price, with various sorts of complicity of a negative kind—insensibility, stupidity, cowardice if not actual criminality. He was interrupted in these reflections by the voice of Giulia, saying, "By the way, d'you know any dress has come? I want to show it to you . . . Wait here a minute."

She rushed out of the room and Marcello rose from the table, went over to the window and threw it wide open. The window looked out over the street, or rather, since it was the top-floor flat, over the jutting parapet of the building, below which one could see nothing. But beyond this emptiness lay the full extent of the attic floor of the building opposite—a row of windows with shutters open through which the occupants of the room could be seen. It was a flat very similar to Giulia's: a bedroom, with the beds still unmade; a "good" drawing room with the usual sham, dark-colored furniture; a dining room at whose table three people, two men and a woman, could be seen sitting. These rooms opposite were very near because the street was not wide, and Marcello could distinguish the three people at the dining room table extremely clearly—a thickset, elderly man with a great mane of white hair, a younger man, thin, brown, and a blonde woman

other wedding dress, but Marcello was glad that Giulia should be pleased with this perfectly ordinary dress in exactly the same way in which millions and millions of other women before her had been pleased. The rounded, exuberant curves of Giulia's figure were moulded with clumsy obviousness by the glossy white silk. All at once she came up to Marcello, and dropping the veil and holding up her face toward him, said, "Now give me a kiss . . . but don't touch me, or my dress will get crumpled." At that moment Giulia turned her back to the window and Marcello faced her. As he bent down to touch her lips with his he looked across into the dining room of the flat opposite and saw the white-haired man rise from the table and leave the room. Immediately afterward, the other two, the thin, brown young man and the blonde woman, also rose, almost automatically, and as they stood there they kissed each other. This sight pleased him, for after all he was behaving just like those two people from whom, only a short time before, he had felt himself to be divided by a wholly insuperable gulf. At the same moment Giulia exclaimed impatiently, "Never mind, my dress can go to the devil," and without letting go of Marcello, half closed the shutters with her other hand. Then, pressing her whole body against him, she threw her arms around his neck. They kissed in the darkness, hampered by the veil, and once again, as his fiancée clung tightly to him and wriggled and sighed and kissed him, it struck Marcello that she was acting in all innocence, unconscious of any contradiction between this embrace and her bridal costume; and this was yet another proof that it was permissible for normal people to take the utmost liberties with normality itself. At last they separated, breathless, and Giulia whispered, "We mustn't be impatient . . . just a few days more and then you'll be able to kiss me even in the street."

"I must go," he said, wiping his mouth with his handkerchief.

"I'll come with you."

They felt their way out of the dining room and into the hall. "We'll see each other this evening, *after dinner*," Giulia said. Tenderly, lovingly she gazed at him, leaning

against the doorpost. The veil, displaced by the kiss, hung untidily on one side. Marcello went up to her and straightened it, saying, "That's all right now." At the moment there was a hum of voices on the landing of the floor below. Giulia, bashful, drew back, threw him a kiss with the tips of her fingers and hurriedly shut the door.

CHAPTER 6

THE idea of confession did not please Marcello. He was not religious in the sense of formally practicing the prescribed rites; nor was he very sure that he had any natural inclination toward religious feeling; yet he would have been quite willing to look upon the confession demanded by Father Lattanzi as one of the many conventional acts upon which he was embarking with a view to establishing himself, once and for all, as a normal person, had it not been that this matter of confession involved the revelation of two things which for different reasons he felt it quite impossible to confess—the tragedy of his childhood and his mission to Paris. An obscure instinct told him that there was a subtle connection between these two things; and yet it would have been very difficult for him to say clearly what this connection was. Furthermore, he was quite aware that, among the many possible standards of behavior, he had not chosen the Christian standard that forbids man to kill, but another, entirely different one, political and of recent introduction, that had no objection to bloodshed. In Christianity, in fact, as represented by the Church with its hundreds of dignitaries, its innumerable churches, its saints and its martyrs, he did not recognize the power that was needed to bring him back into that communion with other men from which he had been debarred by the Lino affair—that power which he felt to be implicit in the plump Minister with the lipstick-stained mouth, in the cynical secretary, and in all his superiors in the Secret Service. Marcello was conscious of all this by some obscure intuition rather than by

any process of thought, and his melancholy was increased by it for he was like a man who, all other ways being closed, sees but one way out, and that a distasteful one.

But he must make up his mind, he thought as he jumped on the streetcar going toward Santa Maria Maggiore, he must choose between making a complete confession, according to the rules of the Church, or confining himself to a partial, purely formal confession, simply to please Giulia. Although he was neither a practicing nor a believing Christian, he inclined to the first of these alternatives; hoping, almost, by means of his confession, if not to alter his destiny, at least to attach himself firmly to it by yet another tie. As the trolley moved through the streets he debated the problem with his usual rather dull, pedantic seriousness. As far as Lino was concerned, he felt more or less easy. He would be able to tell the story as it had really happened, and the priest, after the usual examination and the usual recommendations, would not but give him absolution. But with regard to the confession which, as he well knew, involved fraud, ~~treachery~~ and, in its last stage, possibly the death of a man, he realized that this was an entirely different matter. The point, in this case, was not so much to obtain approval of it as the mere fact of talking about it. He was not at all sure that he was capable of it; for to speak of it would mean abandoning one standard for another; submitting to Christian judgment something that he had hitherto considered to be entirely unrelated to it; betraying his implicit obligation of secrecy and silence; in fact, risking the whole carefully built-up edifice of his absorption into normality. All the same, he thought it was worthwhile making the attempt, if only in order to convince himself yet again, by this final certificate of official approbation of the edifice' solidity.

He was aware that he was considering these alternatives without excessive emotion, in a cool, impassive spirit like that of a detached spectator, just as if he had made his choice already and all that had to happen in the future was discounted in advance, though he could not know how or when. He was so little troubled by doubt that when he entered the vast church, filled with a com-

forting shade and silence and coolness after the glare and noise and heat of the street, he went so far as to forge his confession. He started to wander about over its deserted flagstones, from one aisle to another, like an idle tourist. He had always found churches pleasing to him—safe points in a fluctuating world, constructions by means casual in which the things that he himself was seeking—order, a standard, a rule of life—had found, in other days, their massive and splendid expression. Very often he would go into a church—numerous as they are in Rome—and sit down on a bench, without praying, in the contemplation of something that might have lifted his own case if only conditions had been different. The thing that attracted him in churches was not the solutions that they offered and that it was impossible for him to accept, but rather a final result he could not but appreciate and admire. He liked all churches; but the more imposing they were, the more magnificent, the more profane, the more he liked them. In such churches, in which religion had evaporated and become a majestic, ordered worldliness, he seemed to recognize the point of transition from primitive religious belief to a now adult society which nevertheless, without that far off belief, could not have existed.

At this hour the church was deserted. Marcello went right up beneath the altar, and then, moving close to one of the pillars of the right hand aisle, looked down the full length of the floor, seeking to reduce his own stature to nothing and to drop his eye to ground level. How vast the floor looked, seen thus in perspective, as an ant might see it! It seemed like a great plain and made one almost giddy. Then he looked up, and his eye, following the feeble glimmer cast by the dim light upon the rounded surfaces of the immense marble shafts, rebounded from pillar to pillar all the way down to the door where he had entered.

At that moment someone came in, lifting the heavy curtain and letting in a segment of crude white light. How small the figure in the doorway looked, far away at the other end of the church! Marcello went round behind the altar and looked at the mosaics in the apse. The figure of

Christ, surrounded by four saints, arrested his attention; whoever had painted Him in that way, he thought, certainly had no doubts about what was normal and what was abnormal. He bent his head as he made his way slowly towards the confessional in the right-hand aisle. He was thinking now that it was useless to regret not having been born in other times and other conditions. He was what he was precisely because the times and conditions in which he was living were no longer the same as those that had permitted the erection of this church; and his whole moral obligation lay in the conscious recognition of this reality.

He went up to the confessional, which, made all of dark carved wood, was proportionate in size to the huge basilica, and was in time to catch a glimpse of the priest sitting inside it as he drew the curtain across and hid himself; but he did not see his face. With a habitual gesture, as he knelt down, he pulled up his trousers at the knee so that they should not get crumpled; then he said in a low voice, "I want to make my confession."

From the other side came the priest's voice, answering, in a subdued but frank, brisk tone, that he might begin at once. The voice was full and rhythmical, a deep bass, the voice of a mature man with a strong Southern accent. In spite of himself Marcello could not help conjuring up a monkish figure with a face all smothered in black beard, with thick eyebrows, a massive nose, ears and nostrils full of hairs. A man, he felt, made of the same heavy, massive material as the confessional itself, a man without suspicions, without subtleties. The priest, as he had foreseen, asked him how long it was since he had confessed, and he answered that he had never confessed except during his childhood and that he was doing it now because he was intending to get married. After a moment's silence the priest's voice on the other side of the grating said, in a somewhat indifferent tone. "You have done very wrong, my son. . . . And how old are you?"

"Thirty," said Marcello.

"You have lived for thirty years in sin," said the priest, in the tone of an accountant announcing the amount of an overdraft. He resumed after a moment's pause, "For

thirty years you have lived like an animal, not like a human being."

Marcello bit his lip. The confessor's authority, as expressed in this brisk, familiar manner of judging his case before he even knew its details, was obnoxious and irritating to him. Not that the priest—probably a good man who performed his office scrupulously—displeased him, nor the place, nor the rite itself; but in contrast to the Ministry, where everything had displeased him but where authority had seemed to him obvious and unquestionable, here he felt an instinctive desire to rebel. He said, however, with an effort, "I have committed every sin . . . even the worst."

"Every sin?"

Now I'm going to say I killed a man, he thought, and I want to see what effect it will have upon me. He hesitated, and then, exerting himself, succeeded in pronouncing in a clear, firm voice, "Yes, every sin; I've even killed a man."

The priest immediately exclaimed in a lively manner but without either indignation or surprise, "You killed a man and yet you did not feel the need to confess."

Marcello reflected that that was exactly the right thing for the priest to have said: no horror, no surprise, merely an official reproof for not having confessed so grave a sin at the proper time. And he was grateful to the priest, just as he would have been grateful to a police inspector who, faced with the same confession, had placed him, without comment and without delay, under arrest. Everyone had to act his part, and only in that way could the world endure. In the meantime, however, he was conscious that in revealing his own tragedy he again experienced no particular feeling; and he was surprised at this indifference, which was in such strong contrast to his profound agitation of a short time before, when Giulia's mother had announced that she had had an anonymous letter. He said, in a calm voice, "I killed a man when I was thirteen . . . in self-defense . . . and almost without meaning to."

"Tell me how it happened."

He changed his position slightly as his knees were beginning to hurt him, and then began, "One morning

when I came out of school a man came up to me with some excuse . . . At that time I was longing to possess a revolver . . . not a toy one but a real revolver. He promised to give me a revolver and so succeeded in convincing me to get into his car. . . He was some foreign chauffeur and had the use of the car all day long while she was away, traveling abroad. . . I was completely ignorant at that time, and when he made certain proposals to me I didn't even understand what it was all about.

"What sort of proposals?"

"Sexual proposals," said Marcello soberly. "I didn't know what sexual love was, either normal or abnormal. He got into the car, then, and he took me to his employment office."

"And what happened there?"

"Nothing, or practically nothing. . . First of all he made two or two attempts, then he was sorry and made a promise that from then on I wouldn't pay any attention to him, even if he invited me again to get into the car."

"What d'you mean by 'practically nothing'?"

"No," said Marcello, slightly surprised, "he only put his arm round my waist, for a moment, in the passage."

"Go on."

"He had foreseen, however, that he would not forget me. . . And the next day he was again waiting for me when I came out of school. . . This time he told me that he would give me the revolver, and I accepted it, at first hung back a little and then I got into the car."

"Where did you go?"

"As before, to the villa, to his own room. . ."

"And this time, how did he behave?"

"He was quite different," said Marcello; "he was quite beside himself. . . He said he wouldn't give me the revolver and that, one way or another, I had to do what he wanted. . . As he said this he was holding the revolver in his hand. . . Then he took hold of my arm and pushed me down on the bed, making me hit my head against the wall. . . The revolver meanwhile had fallen on the floor."

round my legs. . . I seized the revolver, jumped up from the bed and took a few steps backward, and then, throwing out his arms, he shouted, 'Kill me, kill me like a dog . . .' Then I—just as if I was obeying him—fired, and he back on the bed. . . And I ran away and knew nothing re about it. . . All this happened many years ago. . . Recently I went and looked up the newspapers of that e and found out that the man died that same evening, hospital."

Marcello had told his tale without hurrying, choosing words with care and pronouncing them with precision. was aware, while he was speaking, that as usual he t nothing—nothing except that cold, remote sadness it was customary with him whatever he said or did. The est, without commenting in any way on the story, asked once, "Are you sure you have told the whole truth?"

"Yes, I'm certain," replied Marcello, surprised.

"You know," went on the priest, suddenly arousing nself, "you know that if you keep back or distort e truth or part of it, your confession is not valid, and sides, you commit a grave sacrilege. . . What really ppened between you and that man, the second time?"

"But . . . just what I've told you."

"Was there no carnal relation between you? . . . Did not use violence?"

So murder, Marcello could not help thinking, was less portant than the sin of sodomy. He confirmed what he d said, "There was nothing except what I've told you."

"It would appear," continued the priest inflexibly, at you killed the man to avenge yourself for something at he had done to you. . ."

"He had done absolutely nothing to me."

There was a brief silence, filled, it seemed to him, with disguised incredulity. "And since then," asked the est all of a sudden, in an entirely unexpected manner, ave you ever had relations with men?"

"No . . . my sexual life has been, and still is, perfectly rmal."

"What do you mean by 'normal' sexual life?"

"In that respect I am a man just like any other man. . . e first time I had a woman was in a brothel; at the age

of seventeen . . . and since then I have never had any relations except with women."

"And that's what you call a normal sexual life?"

"Yes, why not?"

"But that too is abnormal," said the priest triumphantly; "that too is sin. . . Has nobody ever told you, my poor child?—the normal thing is to marry and have relations with your own wife with the object of bringing children into the world."

"That's just what I'm on the point of doing," said Marcello.

"Good, good, but it's not enough. . . You can't go to the altar with bloodstained hands."

At last we're coming to it, Marcello could not help thinking, for he had almost believed, for a moment, that the priest had forgotten the main object of his confession. He said, as humbly as he could, "Tell me what I must do."

"You must repent," said the priest; "only by a sincere and profound repentance can you expiate the evil you have done."

"I have already repented," said Marcello thoughtfully, "if repentance means a strong desire never to have done certain things, then I have indeed repented." He would have liked to add: "but this repentance has not been enough . . . it could not be enough." However, he restrained himself.

The priest said hurriedly, "It is my duty to warn you that if what you tell me now is not true, my absolution has no value. . . You know what awaits you if you deceive me?"

"What?"

"Damnation."

The priest uttered this last word with a particular satisfaction. Marcello probed his imagination to see what this word recalled, and found nothing; not even the old picture of the flames of hell. But at the same time he was aware that the word meant more than the priest had intended it to mean. And an anxious shudder ran through him, as though he knew that this damnation, whether he repented or not, was in store for him, and that it was

not in the priest's power to save him from it. "I have truly repented," he repeated bitterly.

"And you have nothing else to tell me?"

Marcello was silent for a moment before replying. He realized now that the time had come for him to speak of his mission, which, he knew, would involve actions liable

be condemned—in fact already condemned beforehand by the rules of Christianity. He had foreseen this moment and had rightly ascribed the greatest importance to his own ability to reveal the mission. And then, with quiet, melancholy feeling of a discovery that he had expected, he found himself, almost at the moment when he was opening his mouth to speak, held back by an insuperable repugnance. It was not a moral disgust, nor was it shame, nor indeed any sense of guilt; it was something utterly different which had nothing to do with guilt. It was, so to speak, an overruling inhibition, dictated by a profound complicity and loyalty. He *ought not* to speak about his mission, that was all, and this was intimated to him in an authoritative manner by that same conscience which had remained dumb and inert at the moment when he announced to the priest, "I have killed a man." Not entirely convinced, he tried once again to speak, but again he was conscious of that same repugnance halting his tongue and obstructing his utterance, in the automatic manner in which a lock springs open when the key is turned. Once again, therefore, and with even stronger proof, he had confirmation of the power of authority as represented at the Ministry by the contemptible Minister and his no less contemptible secretary. It was, like all other kinds of authority, a mysterious thing which, so it seemed, sank its roots down into the deepest part of his spirit, whereas the Church, apparently so much more authoritative, went no deeper than the surface. And so, for the first time being deceitful he said, "Ought I to tell my fiancée, before we get married, what I've told you today?"

"Have you never said anything about it to her?"

"No, it would be the first time."

"I don't see any necessity for it," said the priest; "you

uld upset her to no purpose . . . and you would be endangering your family's peace of mind."

"Yes, you're right," said Marcello.

Another silence ensued. Then the priest said, in a concisive tone, as though he were putting his last and final question: "Tell me, my son, have you ever been a member, or are you a member now, of any subversive group or club?"

Marcello, who had not expected this question, was disconcerted and, for a moment, silenced. Clearly, he thought, the priest was putting this question by order of his superiors, in order to ascertain the political leanings of his flock. Yet it was significant that he should ask it of himself, who approached the rites of the Church as a matter of form, considering them as ceremonies unrelated to the society of which he desired to be a member, was in point of fact being asked by the priest not to put himself in opposition to that society. This was his request, rather than that he should not put himself in opposition to *him*. He would have liked to reply: "No, I am a member of a group that hunts down subversive elements." But he resisted this malicious temptation and simply said, "To tell the truth, I am a government official."

This answer evidently pleased the priest, for, after a short pause, he quietly resumed, "Now you must promise me that you will pray. . . And I don't mean that you must pray just for a few days, or a few months . . . or even a few years . . . but all the rest of your life. . . You must pray for your own soul and for the soul of that man. . . and you must make your wife pray too, and your children, if you have any. . . Prayer is the only thing that can draw God's attention to you and obtain His pity for you. . . Do you understand? . . . And now concentrate your thoughts and pray with me."

Marcello automatically bowed his head and listened through the grating to the subdued, hurrying voice of the priest as he recited a prayer in Latin. And then the priest, in a louder voice and still in Latin, pronounced the form of absolution; and Marcello rose from the confessional.

But, as he passed across in front of it, the curtain was drawn aside and the priest beckoned to him to stop. He

saw with surprise that he was just as he had pictured him rather fat, bald, with a big rounded forehead, thick eyebrows, round brown eyes that were serious but not intelligent, a full-lipped mouth. A country priest, he thought, a mendicant friar. The priest, in the meantime is holding out toward him, in silence, a little book with a colored picture on its cover—the *Life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola* in an edition for young Catholics. "Thank you," said Marcello, examining the little book. The priest made another gesture as though to say that there was no need to thank him, and drew the curtain again. Marcello walked away to the entrance door.

Just as he was on the point of going out, however, he cast a glance round the church, with its two rows of piers, its coffered ceiling, its deserted floor, its great altar and it seemed to him that he was saying farewell forever to an ancient survival of a world such as he longed for and such as he knew could never exist again. It was a kind of mirage in reverse, based upon an irrevocable past from which his steps carried him further and further away. Then he lifted the heavy curtain and went out into the strong light of a clear sky, into the square with its metallizing of streetcars and its vulgar background of nondescript buildings and shops.

CHAPTER 7

WHEN Marcello got out of the bus in the quarter where his mother lived he became conscious, almost immediately, that he was being followed at some distance by a man. As he walked in a leisurely way down the deserted street past the walls of gardens, he took a quick look at himself. He was a man of middling height, rather stout, with a square face whose expression was honest and good-natured but not without a certain sly cunning such as is often to be seen on the faces of peasants. He was wearing a brown suit that had faded to a color between brown and

purple, and a hat that was intended to be light gray was pulled well down on his head but had its brim turned up in front in the proper peasant manner. If he had seen him in the piazza of a small town on market day, Marcello would have taken him for a farm bailiff. The man had traveled up in the same bus as Marcello, had got out at the same stopping-place and now was following him on the opposite pavement without taking much trouble to conceal the fact, regulating his pace according to Marcello's and never for a moment taking his eyes off him. But this fixed stare of his seemed uncertain of itself—just as though the man were not entirely sure of Marcello's identity and wished to study his face before approaching him.

In this way they walked together the whole way up the hill, in the silence and heat of early afternoon. In the gardens, beyond the railings of the closed gates, there was no one to be seen; nor was there a sign of anyone, up the whole length of the street, beneath the green tunnel formed by the overhanging foliage of the pepper trees. Finally this solitude, this silence made Marcello suspicious, since there were conditions clearly favorable for some surprise attack, and which might have been deliberately chosen by his pursuer. Brusquely, with sudden decisiveness, he left the pavement and crossed the street to the other man. "Perhaps you were looking for me?" he asked, when he came within a few paces of him.

The man, too, had stopped at Marcello's question, with an almost timid expression on his face. "Excuse me," he said in a low voice, "I only followed you because I thought perhaps we might both be going to the same place . . . otherwise I should not have dreamed of doing so. . . Excuse me, are you by any chance Dr. Clerici?"

"Yes, I am," said Marcello, "and who are you?"

"Orlando, of the Secret Service Police," said giving a kind of military salute. "I was sent to Baudino. . . He gave me two addresses for you—first the boarding house where you live and this address here. I didn't find you at the boarding house, I came to you here and it so happened that you were in the bus. . . It's an urgent matter."

"Come along, then," said Marcello, walking off without more ado toward the gate of his mother's villa. He took a key from his pocket, opened the gate and invited the man to come in. He obeyed, respectfully removing his hat and displaying a perfectly round head with sparse black hair and, at the crown, a white circular bald patch that looked exactly like a tonsure. Marcello walked in front of him down the path, making for the far end of the garden where he knew there was a pergola with a table and two iron chairs. As we went, he could not help noticing once again the neglected, overgrown look of the garden. The clean white gravel on which, as a child, he had loved to run up and down had disappeared years ago, buried under soil or scattered abroad. The outline of the path, swallowed up in rough grass, could be traced chiefly by the remains of two small myrtle hedges, uneven now, and with gaps in them, but still recognizable. The flower beds running beside the hedges were also smothered in exuberant weeds; the rose trees and other flowering plants were entangled with bristling shrubs and briars in inextricable confusion. Here and there, too, in the shade of the trees, were piles of rubbish, disintegrated packing cases, broken bottles and all sorts of similar objects which are generally consigned to attics. He averted his eyes in disgust from this sight, asking himself, as he had often done before, with a mixture of surprise and discouragement, "Why on earth can't they tidy up? So little is needed . . . Why it it?" Further on, the path ran between the wall of the villa and the garden wall, that same ivy-covered wall over which, as a child, he had been accustomed to hold communication with his neighbor Roberto. He led the Secret Service agent into the pergola and sat down on the iron chair, inviting him to do the same. But he remained respectfully standing. "There's not very much to tell, sir," he said hastily. "I am entrusted by the Colonel to inform you that you are to stop, on your way to Paris, at S." and he named a town not far from the frontier—"and to go and ask for Signor Gabrio, at 3 Via dei Glicini."

"A change of program," thought Marcello. It was characteristic of the Secret Service, as he knew, deliberately

and at the last moment to make changes of plan, with the object of distributing responsibility and covering up traces. "Where is it I'm to go in Via dei Glicini?" he could not help asking, "is it a private apartment?"

"Well, actually no, Doctor," said the Secret Service man with a broad smile, half knowing and half embarrassed; "it's a bawdy house. . . The proprietress is called Enrichetta Parodi. . . But you must ask for Signor Gabrio. . . The house, like all these places, is open till midnight. . . But it would really be better, sir, if you went early in the morning, when there's nobody there. . . I shall be there too." He was silent for a moment. Then, unable to interpret the complete lack of expression on Marcello's face, he added in embarrassment: "That's just for the sake of security, sir."

Marcello, without saying a word, raised his eyes and considered him for a moment. It was his duty to dismiss him now, but, for some reason unknown to himself—perhaps because of the honest, homely expression on the square, broad face—he wanted to add a word or two, of an unofficial kind, to show that he felt friendly towards him. Finally he asked, at random, "How long have you been in the Service, Orlando?"

"Since 1925, sir."

"And in Italy all the time?"

"Scarcely at all, sir," answered the Secret Service man with a sigh, evidently anxious for a confidential talk; "oh, sir, if I could tell you what my life has been like since then, and what I've been through! . . . Always on the move—Turkey, France, Germany, Kenya, Tunisia . . . never still for an instant." He paused for a moment, gazing fixedly at Marcello; then with rhetorical yet sincere solemnity, he added, "And all for Family and Fatherland, sir."

Marcello again looked up at him as he stood there, hat in hand, almost at attention; then, with a gesture of dismissal, said: "All right then, Orlando. . . Tell the Colonel I'll stop at S., as he wishes."

"Yes, sir." He saluted and walked away past the wall of the villa.

Left alone, Marcello sat staring into emptiness. It was

the leaves and branches of the Virginia creeper, scored face with discs of dazzling light. The painted iron that once had been spotless, was now a dirty white, black and rusty stains where the paint had flaked off. As he looked out from the pergola he could see the path through the garden wall where the opening in the ivy had been through which he had been accustomed to communicate with Roberto. The ivy was still there, and it might have been possible to look through into the next garden; but Roberto's family no longer lived there, the villa was now occupied by a dentist who received clients in his own home. Suddenly a lizard ran down the stem of the Virginia creeper and came fearlessly forward on to the table. It was a big lizard of the most common type, with a green back and a white belly that throbbed against the yellowish paint of the table. Rapidly, in little darting steps, it came quite close to Marcello and then stopped dead, its sharp head raised in his direction, its little black eyes staring in front of it. He looked at it with affection, and did not move for fear of frightening it. He remembered the time when as a boy he had slaughtered the lizards and then, to rid himself of his remorse, had in vain sought to involve the timid Roberto as a partner and ally. At the time he had not succeeded in finding anybody to lighten the burden of his guilt. He had been left to face the death of the lizards alone; and in that loneliness he had recognized the evidence of his crime. But now, he thought, he was not, he never would be, alone. Even if he committed a crime—provided he committed it for certain ends—he would have the support of the state at his back, as well as its dependent political, social and military organizations, great masses of people who thought as he did, and, outside Italy, other states, and millions of people. What he was going to do, he reflected, was a worse thing than killing a few lizards; and yet there were so many people on his side, beginning with the honest Secret Service man Orlando, a married man and the father of five children. "For Family and Fatherland," that phrase, so ingenuous in spite of its solemnity, like a fine, bright-colored banner flying in a joyful breeze.

on a sunny day while trumpets sound and soldiers march; and it echoed in his ears, inspiring yet sad, mingling hope with melancholy. "For Family and Fatherland," he thought, "that's enough for Orlando . . . why can't it be enough for me too?"

As he sat there, he heard the sound of a car from the direction of the entrance gate, and at once rose with a brusque movement that scared the lizard away. Without hurrying, he left the pergola and walked toward the gate. An old, black motorcar was standing in the avenue, not far from the still open gate. The chauffeur, in a white livery with blue facings, was just closing it, but when he saw Marcello he stopped and raised his cap.

"Alberi," said Marcello in his quietest voice, "we're going to the clinic today, so there's no need to put the car in the garage."

"Very good, Signor Marcello," replied the chauffeur. Marcello glanced at him sideways. Alberi was a young man with an olive complexion and coal-black eyes with whites like glossy white china. He had very regular features, close-set white teeth, carefully oiled black hair. He was not tall, yet he gave the effect of being built on a large scale, perhaps because of the smallness of his hands and feet. He was of the same age as Marcello, but appeared older, owing, possibly, to a kind of Oriental softness that insinuated itself into each of his features and looked as though, with time, it would inevitably turn to plumpness. As he was closing the gate Marcello looked at him again, with aversion, then he walked away toward the house.

He opened the french window and went into the drawing room, that was almost in darkness. He was immediately struck by the musty, unwholesome smell hanging in the air, comparatively slight in contrast to that of the other rooms where his mother's ten Pekinese dogs roamed freely, but all the more noticeable here where they scarcely ever penetrated. When he opened the window a little light came into the room and for a moment he saw the furniture in its gray dust covers, the rolled-up carpets standing upright in the corners, the piano muffled in sheets pinned together. He went through the drawing

room and dining room and out into the hall and then started up the stairs. Half way up, on a bare marble step (the carpet, worn out, had vanished long since and never been replaced) lay a piece of dog's excrement, and he made a detour so as not to step in it. When he reached the landing he went straight to the door of his mother's room and opened it. He had barely had time to do so before all ten Pekinese, like a long-contained flood of water that suddenly overflows, surged out between his legs and rushed, barking, all over the landing and staircase. Hesitating in the doorway, he watched them irritably as they ran away, with their elegant, feathery tails and ir sulky, almost catlike muzzles. Then, from the dim half-darkness of the room, came his mother's voice, "Is that you, Marcello?"

Yes, Mother, it's me. . . But what about these dogs?" Let them go . . . poor little angels . . . they've been shut all the morning . . . yes, yes . . . you can let them go." Marcello frowned ill-humoredly and went into the room. The air there seemed to him quite unbreathable: the windows had been shut since the night before and a close, stuffy smell, mingled with the smell of dogs and of smoke, hung everywhere; and the heat of the sun on the outside of the shutters seemed to make all these smells ferment and turn sour. Stiffly, watchfully, as if he feared moving to dirty himself or to become impregnated with these unpleasant odors, he went over to the bed and sat down on the edge of it, his hands resting on his knees.

As his eyes became gradually accustomed to the semi-darkness, he could see the whole room. Underneath the window, in the diffused light which penetrated through the long curtains, soiled and yellow with age—that looked to him as though they were made of the same flimsy material as the many intimate garments scattered about the room—stood a long row of aluminum plates containing the dogs' food. The floor was littered with slippers and stockings. Near the bathroom door, in an almost darkness, he caught a glimpse of a pink dressing gown hanging over a chair, just as it had been thrown there the evening before, half on the ground and with one sleeve

dangling. From its survey of the room his cold, disgusted glance traveled to the bed upon which his mother lay. As usual she had not thought to cover herself when he came in, and was half naked. Lying back against the head of the bed with its worn and dingy blue silk upholstery, her hands clasped behind her head, she stared at him in silence. Beneath the mass of her hair, divided into two puffed-out, brown wings, her face showed pale and thin, almost triangular, dominated by the eyes that looked large and cadaverously dark in the dim light.

She was wearing a greenish transparent undergarment reaching barely to the top of her thighs; and once again he was forced to think of her, not as the middle-aged woman she really was, but as an elderly, dried-up little girl. The ribs in her fleshless chest stood out like a rack made of small, sharp bones; and her sunken breasts were visible through the transparent material as two round, dark patches of perfect flatness. But it was above all her thighs that aroused a feeling of disgust and of pity in Marcello: thin and puny, they were just like those of a little girl of twelve who has not yet started to develop her womanly shape. His mother's age betrayed itself by marks on her wasted skin and by the color, a frigid, sickly whiteness with mysterious bluish or livid patches. "Bruises," he thought, "or bites, from Alberi." But below the knees her legs still looked perfect, as did her very small feet with their close-set toes. Marcello would have preferred not to let his mother see his ill-humor; but once again he could not restrain himself. "How many times have I asked you not to receive me like that—almost naked?" he said scornfully, and without looking at her.

Impatiently, but without rancor, she replied: "Ugh, what a very strict son I've got!"—and drew a corner of the bed cover over herself. Her voice was hoarse; and this, too, displeased Marcello. He recalled how, when he was a child, it had been sweet and clear as a song; this hoarseness was the result of drink and other forms of excess.

After a moment he said, "Well, we're going to the clinic today."

"Very well, we'll go," said his mother, pulling herself up and groping for something behind the head of the

bed; "though I feel dreadfully ill and though our going to see him makes no difference, one way or another, to this poor man."

"Still, he's your husband and my father," said Marcello, staring at the floor with his head between his hands.

"Yes, of course he is," she said. She had now retrieved the electric cord and pressed the switch. This turned on a dim lamp on the bedside table that looked to Marcello as if it were wrapped around with a pair of worn drawers. "And yet," she went on, rising from the bed and putting her feet to the ground, "to tell you the truth, sometimes I wish he would die. . . He himself would never even know it . . . and I wouldn't have to go on paying all that money for the clinic. . . I've so little. . . I think," she added in a suddenly mournful tone, "I think, I may have to give up the car."

"Well, really, would that matter?"

"It would matter very much," she said with childlike resentment and shamelessness. "As it is, with the car, I have an excuse for keeping Alberi and seeing him whenever I want to. . . If I give it up, I shan't have any excuse any more."

"My dear Mother, don't talk to me about your love for Marcello calmly, digging the nails of one hand into the palm of the other."

"My lovers! . . . He's the only one I've got. . . When you talk to me about that silly hen of a girl you're going to marry, I've a perfect right to talk about him, poor child, he's far more attractive and intelligent than she is."

Curiously, these insults to his fiancée uttered by his mother, who could not bear Giulia, did not offend Marcello. Perhaps it's true, he said to himself, perhaps she really is rather like a hen . . . but I like her to be that. In a softened tone, he said, "Well then, are you going to get dressed? If we're going to the clinic, it's time we went."

"All right, just a moment." Moving lightly, almost like a shadow, she crossed the room on tiptoe, picking up her pink dressing gown from the chair as she passed and throwing it over her shoulders. Then she opened the bathroom door and vanished.

As soon as his mother had gone out, Marcello went over to the window and opened it wide. The air outside was hot and still, but he felt an acute sense of relief, as though he were looking out onto a glacier instead of a stuffy garden. At the same time he seemed almost to be aware of a movement of the air in the room behind him; heavy with stale perfumes and with the stink of animals, it seemed to stir gradually, to pass slowly out through the window and then dissolve into space, like a huge aerial vomit overflowing from the throat of the polluted house. He stood there for some time, looking down at the thick foliage of the wistaria whose branches encircled the window, then turned back into the room. The disorder and the air of neglect struck him afresh, but this time they aroused in him more sadness than disgust.

He felt his eyes fill with tears at this thought, so that the portrait became dim and misty, and he shook his head vigorously. At the same moment the bathroom door opened and his mother appeared on the threshold in her dressing gown. She quickly covered her eyes with her arm exclaiming, "Shut that window . . . shut it at once. . . How can you bear that bright light?"

Marcello hastily lowered the shutter, then he moved close to his mother, and taking her by the arm, made her sit down beside him on the edge of the bed and asked her gently, "And you Mother, how can you bear this disorder?"

She looked at him, hesitating, embarrassed. "I don't know how it happens," she said, "Every time I use something I ought to put it back in its place . . . but, somehow or other, I never manage to remember."

"Mother," said Marcello, all of a sudden, "every age has its own kind of dignity. . . Why, Mother, why have you let yourself go in this way?"

He was pressing her hand; and she, with the other hand, was holding up a hanger from which dangled a dress. For one moment he thought he detected a sign of genuine grief in those huge, childishly distressed eyes, and his mother's lips trembled slightly. Then an expression of annoyance chased away all other emotions. She exclaimed, "Everything that I am, everything that I do displeases you, I know that. . . You can't bear my dogs or my clothes, or my habits. . . But I'm young still, my dear boy, and I want to enjoy life in my own way. . . And now leave me alone," she concluded, snatching away her hand, "otherwise, how will I ever get dressed?"

Marcello said nothing. His mother went into a corner, slipped out of her dressing gown and dropped it on the floor, then opened the wardrobe and put on her dress in front of the looking glass on its door. When she was dressed the excessive thinness of her sharp hips, of her hollow shoulders and her fleshless bosom was even more clearly revealed. She looked at herself for a moment in the mirror, turning from side to side, while with one hand she arranged her hair; then, hopping this way and that

she slipped her feet into two of the many shoes that lay scattered about the floor. "And now let's go," she said, taking up a bag from the chest-of-drawers and moving toward the door.

"Aren't you going to put on a hat?"

"Why should I? There's no need."

They started to go downstairs. "You haven't said anything to me about your wedding," she said.

"I'm getting married the day after tomorrow."

"And where are you going for your honeymoon?"

"To Paris."

"The traditional honeymoon," she said. When she reached the hall she went to the kitchen door and called to the cook. "Matilde. . . Will you be so kind—call the dogs in before it gets dark."

They went out into the garden. Beyond the trees the car was standing, black and dingy, in the drive. "Well then," she said, "it's decided that you don't want to come and live here with me? . . . Although I don't find your wife attractive, I would have made even that sacrifice

Besides, I've so much room."

"So, Mother," answered Marcello.

"You prefer to go to your mother-in-law's," she said. "Well, then, to that horrible flat: four rooms and a kitchen."

She bent down as if to pick a blade of grass, but in so doing she stumbled and would have fallen had not Marcello quickly seized her arm and held her up. He felt beneath her fingers the soft, meager flesh of her arm that seemed to move around the bone like a rag tied round a stick.

Again he was moved with pity for her. They got into the car, Alberi, cap in hand, holding open the door. Then Alberi took his place and drove the car out through the gate.

Marcello took advantage of the moment when he was out again to shut the gate behind them to say to his mother, "I would be perfectly willing to come and live with you—if you sacked Alberi and tidied up your life

. . . and stopped those injections."

She looked at him sideways with uncomprehending eyes. But her thin, sharp nose was trembling slightly, and

all this trembling spread to her small, faded mouth.

in a pale, wry smile. "D'you know what the doctor say she asked. "That one of these days I might die from them."

"Why don't you stop them, then?"

"Will you tell me *why* I should stop them?"

Alberi got into the car again and put on his glasses. Marcello's mother leaned forward and put her hand on the chauffeur's shoulder. It was a thin, transparent hand with the skin stretched tight over the bones and blotchy with red and bluish marks; and the carlet of the nails was almost black. Marcello tried not to look, but could not help it. He saw her hand move along the man's shoulder until it tickled his ear in a light caress. Then she said: "Well, we're going to the clinic."

"Very good, madam," said Alberi, without turning his head.

She closed the dividing pane of glass and threw herself back on the cushions as the car moved gently away. When she fell back on the seat she looked obliquely at her son and to the surprise of Marcello, who was not expecting such intuition on her part, she said, "You're angry because I gave Alberi a little caress, aren't you?"

As she spoke she looked at him with the childish, despairing, slightly twisted smile that was characteristic of her. Marcello tried, unsuccessfully, to alter the disgusted expression on his face. "I'm not angry," he answered. "But I'd rather not have seen."

Averting her head, she said: "You can't know what it means for a woman not to be young any more. . . . Worse than death."

Marcello was silent. The car was moving along silently now beneath the pepper trees, whose feathery branches rustled against the glass of the windows. After a moment she went on, "There are times when I wish I was already. . . I shall be a thin, clean little old woman"—smiled with pleasure, her attention already distracted from his vision of herself—"like a dried flower that's been kept between the pages of a book." She put her hand on Marcello's arm and asked him, "Wouldn't you like to have a little old woman like that for a mother—well seasoned

and well preserved, as if she'd been put away in naphthalene?"

Marcello looked at her and answered with some embarrassment, "That's what you'll be like, some day."

She became serious, and, looking up at him with a dismal smile, said, "D'you really think so? . . . On the contrary, I'm convinced, myself, that you'll find me dead one morning, in that room you so detest."

"Why, Mother?" asked Marcello; but he realized that his mother was speaking seriously and might even be right. "You're young and you must go on living."

"That doesn't prevent me from dying soon. . . I know it; they read it in my horoscope." Suddenly she held up her hand, right under his eyes, adding without any transition, "D'you like this ring?"

It was a heavy ring with an elaborate setting around a hard stone of a milky color. "Yes," said Marcello, scarcely looking at it, "it's lovely."

"You know," went on his mother volubly, "sometimes I think you've inherited everything from your father. . . He too, in the days when he still had his reason, didn't like anything. . . Beautiful things meant nothing to him. . . The only thing he thought of was politics—just like you."

This time, without knowing why, Marcello was unable to repress a strong feeling of irritation. "It seems to me," he said, "that my father and I have nothing at all in common. . . I'm a perfectly reasonable person, normal, whereas he, even before he went to the clinic—from what I remember, and you've always confirmed it—was always . . . how shall I say? . . . rather excitable."

"Yes, but there is something in common between you . . . You neither of you get any fun out of life and you don't want other people to do so. . ." She looked out of the window for a moment and then added suddenly, "I shan't come to your wedding. . . But anyhow you mustn't be offended, because I don't go anywhere now days. . . But since, after all, you are my son, I think I ought to give you a present. . . What would you like?"

"Nothing, Mother," answered Marcello indifferently.

"What a pity!" said his mother ingenuously. "I know you wanted nothing, I wouldn't have spent money. . . But now I've bought it. . . Look!" She fumbled in her bag and brought out a small white case with an elastic band round it. "It's a cigarette case," she noticed that you always carry the pack in your pocket. . . ." She opened the box, took out a flat silver case engraved with stripes close together, flipped it open and held it out to her son. It was filled with Orient cigarettes, and she took the opportunity of helping him to smoke and making Marcello light it for her.

He was a little embarrassed, and, looking at the cigarette case lying open on his mother's knee, said, "I'm touching it, "It's a very beautiful one and I don't know how to thank you, Mother. . . Perhaps it's even more beautiful for me."

"Ugh," said his mother, "how tiresome you are!" She closed the case and, with a prettily intolerant look, tucked it into Marcello's coat pocket. The car turned the corner of a street rather sharply, and she fell on her side. She took advantage of this to put her two hands on his shoulders, throwing back her head slightly and looking at him. "Won't you give me a kiss," she said, "for the present?"

Marcello bent down and touched his mother's cheek with his lips. She threw herself back in her seat and sighed, putting her hand on her breast, "How beautiful! . . . When you were little, I shouldn't have asked you for a kiss. . . You were such an affectionate little boy."

"Mother," said Marcello all of a sudden, "d'you remember the winter when Father was first taken ill?"

"Indeed I do," said his mother, "it was a terrible winter. . . He wanted a separation from me, and to take you off with him. . . He was mad already. . ."

"I mean luckily for you—he went completely mad. . . It was obvious that I was right in wanting to stay with me. . . But why?"

"Well, Mother," said Marcello, taking care not to look at her, "what I dreamed of, all that winter, was not

on living with you any more—with you and Father—but to be sent away to school. . . . Not that that prevented me from being fond of you. . . . That's why, when you say that I've changed since then, you're saying something that isn't right. . . . I was just the same then as I am now . . . and then, as now, I couldn't bear hubbub and disorder . . . that's all." He had spoken drily, almost harshly, but almost at once he repented, seeing a mortified expression darkening his mother's face. And yet he did not want to say anything that might sound as though he were retracting. He had spoken the truth, and that, indeed, was the only thing he could do. At the same time he was again conscious, more intensely than ever, of the oppression of his customary melancholy, reawakened by the unpleasant realization that he had been lacking in filial piety. His mother said in a resigned tone of voice, "Perhaps you're right." At that moment the car came to a stop.

They got out and walked to the gate of the clinic. The street lay in a quiet neighborhood, on the edge of an ancient royal villa. It was a short street. On one side there was a row of five or six old-fashioned suburban houses partially hidden among trees. Along the other side ran the railings of the clinic. At the end of the street the view was blocked by the old gray wall and the thick vegetation of the royal park. Marcello had been visiting his father at least once a month for many years; yet he had never grown accustomed to these visits, and he always experienced a mingled feeling of repugnance and discomfort. It was much the same sort of feeling that he had when he went to see his mother in the house in which he had spent his childhood and youth. But it was very much stronger. His mother's disorder and decay seemed still to be curable; but for his father's madness there was no remedy, and it seemed to point to a disorder and decay of a more general, and utterly incurable, kind. And so, as he came into that quiet street at his mother's side, his heart was oppressed by a hateful sensation of wretchedness and his knees shook. He was aware that he had turned pale, and for a moment, as he cast a hasty glance

at the black spikes of the railings, he felt a hysterical urge to give up the visit and make some excuse to go away. His mother, who had not noticed his agitation, stopped in front of the small black iron gate and pressed the clinic button saying, "D'you know what his latest exaltation is?"

"What?"

"He thinks he's one of Mussolini's ministers. . . . He began about a month ago. . . . I suppose because that he let him read the papers."

Marcello frowned but said nothing. The gate opened and a young male nurse appeared: he wore a white round cap and was tall and plump and fair, with a shaven head and a white, puffy face. "Good day, Franz," said Marcello and greeted him graciously. "How is he?"

"We're better today than yesterday," said the young man, speaking with a harsh German accent. "Yesterday we were very bad."

"Very bad?"

"We had to put on the strait jacket," explained the male nurse, still speaking in the plural, in the affected manner of a governess speaking of her charges.

"The strait jacket. . . . How awful!" In the meantime they had passed through the gate and were walking along a narrow path between the surrounding wall and the wall of the clinic. "The strait jacket, you ought to see it. . . . It's not really a jacket, it's like two sleeves that hold the arms still. . . . Before I saw it, I used to imagine it was like a nightshirt, one of those with a Greek key pattern at the bottom. . . . It's so sad to see him tied up like that, with his arms tight against his sides." She went on talking in a light, almost gay, tone of voice.

They went round the clinic and came out into an open space in front of the main façade. The clinic, a white three-floored suburban villa, had the appearance of an ordinary dwelling, apart from the iron gratings over the windows. Hurrying up the stairs under the porch, the male nurse said, "The Professor's expecting you, Signor Americi." He proceeded the two visitors into a bare, rather dark entrance hall and went and knocked at a closed door.

bove which was an enameled plate with the word "Director" on it.

The door opened and the director of the clinic, Professor Ermini, came rushing out, his towering, massive figure bearing down upon his visitors. "Signora, I'm delighted to see you. . . Doctor Clerici, how are you?" His staccato voice echoed like a bronze gong through the formality of the clinic, between its bare walls. Marcello's mother put out a hand which the professor, bending with visible effort, his huge body enveloped in its robe, gallantly insisted on kissing; Marcello himself, on the other hand, greeted him with the utmost sobriety. The professor's face was extremely like that of a white owl, with large round eyes, a big, curved, beaklike nose, tufts of red mustache falling over a wide, clamorous mouth. Its expression, however, was not that of the melancholy night bird, but was jovial, though with a joviality that was carefully studied and shot through with a kind of cold wariness. He led Marcello and his mother up the stairs. When they were half way up, a metal object, hurled violently from the landing above, came bouncing down the stairs. At the same time a piercing scream rang out, followed by a peal of scornful laughter. The professor bent and picked up the object, an aluminum plate. "It's Signora Donegalli," he said, turning towards the two visitors. "Don't be alarmed. . . She's just an old lady who's usually perfectly quiet but who, every now and then, gets excited and throws anything she can lay her hands on. . ." He laughed. "Why, she'd be a champion bowls-player, if we let her. . . ." He handed the plate to the male nurse and walked on, chattering, down a long corridor between two rows of closed doors. "Why, Signora, you're still in Rome? I thought you'd gone off to the mountains or by the sea by this time."

"I'm going in about a month," she replied. "But I don't know where. . . . For once I should like *not* to go to Venice."

"You take my advice, Signora," said the professor, as he turned a corner in the corridor, "and go to Ischia. . . . I was there just the other day on a trip. . . . It's really

marvelous. . . . We went to a restaurant kept by a certain Carminiello, where we had a fish soup that was a positive poem." The professor turned half around and made a vulgar but expressive gesture with two fingers at the corner of his mouth. "A poem, I tell you—hunks of fish as big as that . . . and a bit of everything besides—little octopuses, rascasse, dog fish, small oysters—the latter particularly good—shrimps, small cuttlefish . . . all combined with a delicious gravy *alla maringara* . . . garlic, oil, tomato, sweet peppers. . . . Signora, words fail me." After assuming a comic, Neopolitan accent for his description of the fish soup, the professor fell back into his native Roman, and added, "D'you know what I said to my wife?—How about getting a nice little house in Ischia before the year's out?"

"Personally, I prefer Capri," said Marcello's mother.

"But that's a place for literary people and invert," said the professor in a rather brutal way. At that moment a series of piercing shrieks reached them from one of the cells. The professor went to the door, opened the peep hole, looked through it for a few seconds, closed it again, and turning back, concluded, "Ischia, my dear Signora. . . . Ischia is the place. Fish soup, sea, sun, life in the open air . . . there's nowhere like Ischia."

Franz, the male nurse, who had been walking a few steps in front of them, now stood waiting beside one of the doors, his massive figure clear cut against the bright light from the window at the end of the corridor. "Has he taken up his usual position?" asked the professor in a low voice. The young man nodded. The professor opened the door and went in, followed by Marcello and his mother.

It was a small, bare room, with a bed fixed to the wall and a white wooden table facing a window with the usual iron grating over it. Sitting at the table with his back to the door, busily writing, Marcello, with a shudder of disgust, saw his father. A tousled mass of white hair stuck out from his head above his thin neck, half hidden by the wide collar of his stiff cape of striped cloth. He was sitting slightly askew, his feet thrust into two huge felt slip-

pers, his elbows and knees turned outwards, his head on one side. Exactly, thought Marcello, like a puppet with broken wires. The entrance of his three visitors did not make him turn around; on the contrary, he seemed to redouble his attention and zeal over what he was writing. The professor went and stood between the window and the table and said with false joviality, "Well, Major, how goes it today? . . . How are you?"

The madman did not answer; he merely raised his hand, as much as to say, "One moment, don't you see I'm busy?" The professor gave Marcello's mother an understanding look and said, "Still at that report, eh, Major? But isn't it going to be too long? . . . The Duce hasn't time to read things if they're too long. . . . He himself is always brief, concise. . . . Brevity, conciseness, Major."

The madman made the same sign as before, waving his bony hand; then, with a strange, wild craziness, he threw a sheet of paper up into the air over his own bowed head. It landed in the middle of the room, and Marcello bent and picked it up. It contained nothing but a few incomprehensible words in a writing full of flourishes and underlinings. Marcello could not be sure even that they were words. While he was examining the paper, the madman began throwing more pieces into the air, still with the same gesture as though he were furiously busy. The sheets of paper came flying up over his white head and were scattered about all over the room. As he threw them up in the air, his gestures became more and more violent, and soon the whole room was full of little sheets of square paper. "Poor dear," said Marcello's mother; "he always did have a passion for writing."

The professor bent forward slightly to speak to the madman. "Major," he said, "here are your wife and son. . . . Don't you want to see them?"

This time the madman spoke, at last, in a low, muttering, hurried, hostile voice, like someone who has been disturbed in the middle of an important occupation. "Let them come back tomorrow . . . unless they have any concrete proposals to make. . . . Can't you see my antechamber's filled with people that I shan't have time to receive?"

"He thinks he's a minister," Marcello's mother whispered to him.

"Minister for Foreign Affairs," the professor confirmed.

"That Hungarian affair," said the madman all of a sudden in an urgent, subdued, troubled voice, still busily writing, "that Hungarian affair. . . . And the head of the government in Prague. . . . And what are they doing in London? And the French, why can't they understand? But *why* can't they understand? Why? Why? Why?" With each "why?" the voice of the madman rose higher, until finally with the last one that he almost screamed, he leaped from his chair and turned around, facing his visitors. Marcello raised his eyes and looked at him. Beneath the white, upstanding hair, the thin, brown, wasted face, with its deeply scored, vertical wrinkles, bore imprinted upon it an expression of solemn, conscientious gravity, of anguish, almost, from the effort of rising to an imaginary occasion of speech-making and ceremony. The madman was holding one of his little sheets of paper on a level with his eyes; and without more ado he began reading, with a strange, breathless haste: "Duce, leader of heroes, king of earth and sea and sky, prince, priest, emperor, commander and soldier"—here he made a gesture of impatience, tempered however by a certain ceremoniousness, as much as to say, "et cetera, et cetera"—"Duce, in this place, which . . ."—and he made another gesture, as if to say, "I'll skip that part, it's superfluous"—then he started again: "In this place I have written a report that I beg you to read from the first"—he stopped and looked at his visitors—"to the last line. Here is my report."

After these introductory words, he threw the sheet of paper up in the air, turned toward the table, took up another and began reading the report. But this time Marcello could not catch a single word: it was true that the madman was reading clearly and distinctly, but his extraordinary haste caused him to run one word into another as if the entire speech consisted of one single word of inordinate length. The words, thought Marcello, must be melting upon his tongue even before he uttered them, as though the devouring fire of madness had dissolved their

shapes like wax and fused them into a single oratorical substance, of a soft, elusive indistinctness. As he went on reading, the words seemed to enter more inextricably one into the other, becoming shorter and shorter and more and more contracted, and the madman himself began to appear overwhelmed by this verbal avalanche. With increasing frequency he took to throwing away the sheets of paper after he had read only the first line; until finally he broke off his reading altogether, leaped with surprising agility onto the bed, and there, retreating into the corner at its head, standing upright against the wall, plunged into a declamatory speech.

That he thought himself to be haranguing an audience, Marcello understood more from his gestures than from his words which, as before, were disconnected and senseless. Like an orator facing a crowd from an imaginary balcony, the madman now raised both arms toward the ceiling; now bent forward with one hand outstretched, as though to introduce some subtle point; now threatened, with fist clenched; now raised his hands, palms outward, to the level of his face. At a certain point there was evidently a burst of applause from the imaginary crowd he was addressing; for the madman, holding out his hand in a characteristic gesture with palm turned downward, seemed to be demanding silence. But the applause, clearly, did not cease, in fact it increased in intensity; and then, having again asked for silence with that same gesture of entreaty, the madman jumped down from the bed, ran across to the professor and, holding him by the sleeve, implored him in a tearful voice, "Do please make them keep quiet. . . . What does applause matter to me? . . . A declaration of war. . . . How can one make a declaration of war if their applause prevents one from speaking?"

"We'll make the declaration of war tomorrow, Major," said the professor, looking down at the madman from the height of his towering figure.

"Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow," yelled the madman in a sudden excess of fury in which anger was mingled with despair, "it's always tomorrow. . . . The declaration of war has got to be made now . . . at once."

"But why, Major? What does it matter? Now, in this

knowing what he's suffering. . . . I know that I myself, if I happen to be underneath a bell tower when they're ringing the bells, I feel I'm going mad."

"But does he suffer?" asked Marcello.

"Wouldn't you suffer if for hours and hours you heard great bronze bells ringing very close to your ear?" The professor turned to the sick man and added, "Now we'll make the bells stop ringing. . . . We'll send the bell-ringer to sleep. . . . We'll give you something to drink and you won't hear them any more." He made a sign to the male nurse, who immediately went out. Turning to Marcello again, he went on, "These are rather serious forms of disorder. . . . The patient passes from a state of frantic cheerfulness to one of profound depression. . . . Just now, while he was reading, he was wildly excited, now he's depressed. Do you want to say anything to him?"

Marcello looked at his father, who was still whimpering pitifully, his head in his hands, and said in a cold voice, "No, I have nothing to say to him, and besides, what's the use? . . . He wouldn't understand anyhow."

"Sometimes they understand," said the professor; "they understand more than you think, they recognize people, even we doctors are taken in. . . ." He laughed. "It's not so simple."

Marcello's mother went over to the madman and said, in an affable sort of way, "Antonio, do you recognize me? . . . Here's Marcello, your son. . . . He's getting married the day after tomorrow. . . . D'you understand? He's getting married."

The madman looked up hopefully at his wife, as an injured dog looks up at his master when the latter bends down over him and asks him, in human words, what is the matter. The doctor turned toward Marcello, exclaiming, "Getting married, getting married! Why, my dear Doctor, I knew nothing about it. . . . My warmest congratulations. My most sincere good wishes."

"Thank you," said Marcello drily.

His mother, moving toward the door, said in her ingenuous way, "Poor dear, he doesn't understand. . . . If he did, he wouldn't be pleased, any more than I am."

"Please, Mother," said Marcello shortly.

"Never mind, your wife has to please *you*, not other people," she replied in a conciliating tone. She turned back towards the madman and said to him, "Good-bye, Antonio."

"The bells," whimpered the madman.

They went out into the corridor, meeting Franz as he came in carrying a glass with the soothing mixture in it. The professor closed the door and said, "It's a curious thing, Doctor, how insane people keep up with the news, how up-to-date they are . . . and how sensitive they are to everything that interests the general public. . . . Now, for instance, there's fascism, there's the Duce, and so you'll find that a very large number of them develop fixations, like your father, with regard to fascism and the Duce. . . . During the war there was an endless number of insane people who thought they were generals and who wanted to take the place of Cadorna or Diaz. . . . And more recently, at the time of Nobile's flight to the North Pole, I had at least three patients who knew for certain exactly where the famous red tent was and who had invented a special apparatus for rescuing the shipwrecked men. . . . Mad people are always abreast of the times. . . . In spite of their madness they do not cease, fundamentally, to take part in public life, and madness itself is the means they use to take part in it—in their own character, of course, as good, but mad, citizens." The doctor laughed coldly, delighted with his own wit. And then, turning toward Marcello's mother, but with the obvious intention of flattering Marcello himself, he said, "But as far as the Duce goes, we're all just as mad as your husband, aren't we, Signora?—mad enough to need tying up, mad enough for treatment with the douche and the trait jacket. . . . The whole of Italy is just one big lunatic asylum, ha, ha, ha."

"In that way my son is certainly quite mad," said Marcello's mother, naïvely reinforcing the doctor's compliments, "in fact I was saying to Marcello, on our way here, that there were certain points of resemblance between him and his poor father."

Marcello hung back in order to avoid hearing what

they were saying. He saw them walk away toward the far end of the corridor, then turn the corner and disappear, still chattering. He stopped; he was still holding in his hand the sheet of paper upon which his father had written his declaration of war. He hesitated, took out his wallet and put the paper into it. Then he hastened his step and rejoined his mother and the doctor on the ground floor.

"Well then, good-bye, Professor," his mother was saying. "But that poor dear man—is there really no way of curing him?"

"For the present there is nothing science can do," answered the doctor without a hint of solemnity, as though repeating a worn-out mechanical formula.

"Good-bye, Professor," said Marcello.

"Good-bye, Doctor, and again, my warmest and sincerest good wishes."

They walked down the narrow gravel path and out into the street to the car. Alberi was there, beside the open door, cap in hand. They got in without a word and the car started. Marcello sat silent a moment and then asked his mother, "Mother, I want to ask you a question. . . . I think I can speak frankly to you, can't I?"

"What is it?" said his mother vaguely, examining her face in the little mirror of her powder-compact.

"This man that I call my father and that we've just visited—is he really my father?"

His mother started laughing. "Really," she said, "Sometimes you are rather strange. . . . And why shouldn't he be your father?"

"Mother . . . at that time you already had—" Marcello hesitated and then concluded—"you already had lovers. . . . Isn't it possible. . . . ?"

"Oh no, it isn't possible at all," said his mother with calm cynicism. "When I first decided to be unfaithful to your father you were already two years old. . . . The funny thing about it is that you were not h

did one day? He took a photograph of me with you as a baby—"

"And made holes through the eyes of both of us," concluded Marcello.

"Ah, so you knew that," said his mother, rather astonished. "Well, that was really the beginning of his madness. . . . He was obsessed by the idea that you were the son of a certain man that I used to see occasionally at that time. . . . I don't need to say that it was entirely his own imagination. . . . You're *his* son, one has only to look at you. . . ."

"Surely I'm more like you than him," Marcello could not help saying.

"You're like both of us," said his mother, clinching the matter. She put her compact back in her bag, and added, "I've told you already: if there were nothing else, you've both got a fixation about politics—he like a madman, and you, thank God, like a sane person."

Marcello said nothing, but turned his face toward the window. The idea of resembling his father inspired in him an intense disgust. The reference to flesh and blood, in family relationships, had always been repellent to him as an impure, unjust definition. But the resemblance to which his mother alluded not merely disgusted, but in some obscure way frightened him. What connection existed between his father's madness and his own most secret being? He remembered the phrase he had read on the sheet of paper, "Murder and melancholy," and shuddered thoughtfully. The melancholy was already upon him, like a second skin more sensitive than his real one; and as for the murder. . . .

The car was now going through streets in the center of the town, in the false blue light of dusk. Marcello said to his mother, "I'll get out here," and he leaned forward to knock on the glass in order to warn Alberi. "Then I'll see you on your return," said his mother, giving him implicitly to understand that she would not be coming to the wedding; and he was grateful to her for her reticence. Frivolity and cynicism had at least that advantage. He got out, banged the door, and disappeared into the crowd.

CHAPTER 8

AS SOON as the train began to move, Marcello left the window where he was standing talking to his mother-in-law—or rather, listening to her conversation—and went back into the compartment. Giulia, on the other hand, remained at the window; and from the compartment Marcello could see her in the corridor as she leaned out and waved her handkerchief with an anxious urgency that gave a certain pathos to a gesture otherwise quite ordinary. Doubtless, he thought, she would stand there waving her handkerchief as long as she thought she could catch a glimpse of her mother's figure on the platform; and, for her, the moment when she ceased to see that figure would mark in the clearest possible way her own complete and final detachment from her life as a girl—a detachment she had both feared and longed for and which, with her own departure in the train while her mother was left behind, took on a painfully concrete character. Marcello looked a moment longer at his wife as she hung out of the window, in her light-colored dress that was ruckled up, by the movement of her arm, over the well-defined forms of her figure; then he sank back on the cushions, closing his eyes. When he opened them again his wife was no longer in the corridor and the train was already out in the open country. They were crossing an arid, treeless plain, already wrapped in twilight obscurity, beneath a green sky. Here and there the ground rose up into bald hills, and between these hills appeared wide valleys surprisingly devoid both of human habitations and of human figures. A few brick ruins, on the tops

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of the hills, emphasized the feeling of solitude. It was a restful landscape, thought Marcello, inviting one to reflection and fancy. And now, over the horizon at the far side of the plain, the moon had risen, round and blood-red, with a glistening white star at its right hand.

His wife had disappeared and Marcello hoped that she would not come back for a few minutes. He wanted to think, and for the last time, to feel himself alone. He went back, in memory, over the things that he had done during the last few days, and realized, as he recalled them, that they brought him a feeling of vague but profound satisfaction. This, he thought, was the only possible way in which to change one's own life and one's own personality - by action, by movement in time and in space. As usual he was especially pleased at the things that tightened his bonds to the normal, ordinary, expected world. The wedding morning: Giulia, in her wedding dress, running joyfully from one room to another in her rustling silk; himself entering the elevator with a bunch of lilies of the valley in his gloved hand; his mother-in-law who, the moment he came in, threw herself sobbing into his arms; Giulia pulling him behind the door of a cupboard in order to kiss him at her ease; the arrival of the witnesses - two of Giulia's friends, a doctor and a lawyer, and two friends of his own from the Ministry; leaving the house for the church, with people looking out of the window and from the pavements, as they went away in three cars - himself and Giulia in the first, the witnesses in the second and his mother-in-law and two female friends in the third.

A curious thing had happened during the drive. The car had stopped at a traffic signal, and suddenly there had appeared at the window a red, bearded face with a bald forehead and a prominent nose. It was a beggar; but instead of asking for alms, he had said, in a hoarse voice "How about giving me a bridal sugar plum, you two?" - and at the same time had thrust his hand into the car. The sudden apparition of the face at the window, the indiscreet hand stretched out toward Giulia, had irritated Marcello, who with excessive severity, had answered, "Go on, get away, we've nothing for you." At which the man, who was probably drunk, had shouted out at the top of

his voice, "A curse upon you!" and had disappeared. Giulia, frightened, had clung to him, murmuring, "It'll bring us bad luck"; and he, shrugging his shoulders, had replied, "Nonsense . . . he's just a drunk." Then the car had started again and the incident had slipped almost at once from his mind.

Inside the church everything had been normal, in other words quietly solemn, ritual, ceremonious. A little crowd of relations and friends sat here and there in the front pews before the high altar, the men in dark clothes, the women in light-colored, springlike frocks. The church, very rich and ornate, was dedicated to a saint of the Counter-Reformation. Behind the high altar, beneath a canopy of gilded bronze, there was, indeed a statue of this saint in gray marble, larger than life, gazing with eyes upturned to heaven and palms outstretched. Behind the statue, the apse of the church was covered with frescoes in the baroque manner, lively and full of flourishes.

Giulia and he had knelt down in front of the marble balustrade, on a red velvet cushion. The witnesses stood in order behind them, two by two. The service had been a long one, for Giulia's family had insisted on giving it the greatest possible solemnity. From the very beginning, an organ up in the balcony over the entrance door had started playing and had gone on continuously, now softly snoring, now bursting forth in a triumphant clamor beneath the echoing vaults. The priest had been extremely slow—so much so that Marcello, after observing with satisfaction that the ceremony, in all its details, was exactly as he had imagined and desired, after assuring himself that he was doing just what millions of married couples had been doing for hundreds of years before him, and allowed his attention to wander and had started examining the church. It was not a beautiful church, but it was very large, and had been conceived and built, like all Jesuit churches, in order to achieve a theatrical solemnity. The enormous statue of the saint, kneeling in a ecstatic attitude beneath his canopy, was erected over an altar painted to represent marble and crowded with commonplace silver candlesticks, vases of flowers, ornamental statuettes and bronze lamps. Behind the canopy was the curve of the

apse, with its frescoes by some painter of the period: vaporous, swelling clouds, such as might have figured on the curtain of an opera-house, lay across a blue sky streaked by swords of light from a hidden sun. Of the clouds sat various sacred personages, painted with a few bold strokes and with more decorative sense than religious spirit. Prominent among the others and overtopping them all was the figure of the Eternal Father, and suddenly Marcello, as he looked at that bearded, haloed face, could not help seeing in it the face of the beggar who had appeared at the window of the car asking for a sugar plum and who had then cursed him. At that moment the organ was playing loudly and with an almost menacing sternness which seemed to admit no touch of sweetness; and so it was that a resemblance that in other circumstances would have made him smile (the Eternal Father disguised as a beggar putting his head in at the window of a taxi and demanding a sugar plum) recalled to his mind, for some inexplicable reason, those Biblical verses concerning Cain which his eye had happened to fall upon when he had opened a Bible one day, a few years after the Lino affair: *What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.*

And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;

When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.

And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me.

And the Lord said unto him, Therefore, whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.

These verses had seemed to him that day to have been

attained especially for him, cursed as he was, and his voluntary crime and yet, by that same curse, made sacred and untouchable. And then, when he had read them over several times and meditated upon them, he had persuaded of thinking about them, and had forgotten them. But that morning in church, as he looked at the scenes in the fresco, they had come back to him and once again they had seemed well suited to his own case. Could he not without a gloomy conviction that he was cursed by the instrument of his thought into a self terrible with analogy and significance, he had speculated, while the service continued, upon this point. If there was really such a thing as a curse, why had it been hurled against him? With this question his mind was again clouded over with the clinging melancholy that continually oppressed him, the melancholy of a man who is lost and who knows that there is nothing he can do to save himself—and he had told himself that by instinct, at any rate, if not by conscience, he knew that he was under a curse. Not because he had killed Lino but because he had sought and was still seeking to free himself from the burden of remorse, of corruption, of abnormality which that far-off misdeed had laid upon him, without having recourse to religion or the abodes of religion. But what could he do about it? he had gone on to think; he was like that and he could not change himself. There was indeed no ill will in him, only the honest acceptance of the condition to which he was born, of the world as he found it. It was a condition far removed from religion, a world in which the place of religion was taken by other things. He would have preferred, certainly, to have entrusted his life to the ancient, benevolent figures of the Christian faith, to God who was so just, to the Virgin so motherly, to Christ so merciful. But, at the very moment when he was conscious of this desire, he realized that his own life did not belong to him and that therefore he could not entrust it to whomsoever he wished; and that he was outside religion and could not enter into it again, even in order to purify himself and become normal. Normality, as he had thought, was nowhere; elsewhere; or perhaps it was yet to come, and

reconstructed through painful effort, through doubt and through blood.

As if to confirm these thoughts, he had at that moment looked at the woman beside him, at the woman who in a few minutes would be his wife. Giulia was kneeling, her hands clasped together, her face and eyes turned toward the altar, carried away by her own joyful, hopeful ecstasy. And yet, at his look—as though she had been aware of it on her body like the contact of a hand—she had at once turned and smiled at him with her eyes and her mouth with a tender, humble, grateful smile full of an almost animal-like innocence. He had smiled back at her, though less openly; and then, as though it had sprung from that smile, he had felt—perhaps for the first time since he had known her—an impulse, if not actually of love, at least of profound affection mingled with compassion and tenderness. And then it had seemed to him that his look had undressed her, had removed both her wedding dress and her most intimate garments, and that he could see her young and fresh and healthy with her rounded breasts and belly, kneeling there naked beside him on the red velvet cushion, clasping her hands. And he was naked too; and irrespective of any ritual consecration, they were on the point of being truly united, as animals in the woods were united; and this union, whether or not he believed in the rite in which he was taking part, would really come about and from it, as he wished, children would be born. With this thought it had seemed to him, for the first time, that he was placing his feet on firm ground, and he had reflected, "This woman in a short time will be my wife . . . and I shall possess her . . . and she, when she has been possessed, will conceive children . . . and this, for the present, for lack of anything better, will be my point of departure toward normality."

But at that moment he had seen Giulia moving her lips in prayer, and, as he watched that eager movement of her mouth, it had seemed to him that her nudity had suddenly been clothed again, as if by enchantment, with her wedding dress, and he had realized that, she, Giulia, believed firmly in the ritual consecration of their union; and he had not been displeased at this discovery; in

act, it had brought him a feeling almost of relief. For Giulia's normality was not a thing that had to be found or reconstructed; it was there; and she was immersed in it, and, whatever happened, would never forsake it.

And so, as the ceremony came to an end, there had been a sufficiency of feeling and of affection on his part, a feeling and an affection of which he had at first thought himself incapable, and that he felt to be inspired by deep impulses coming from within himself rather than suggested by the place and the marriage rite. Everything, in fact, had been carried out according to the rules of tradition, in such a way as to satisfy not only those who believed in such rules but himself also, who did not believe in them but wished to act as though he did. As he was talking out with his wife on his arm, at the moment when they stopped in the doorway at the top of the steps leading down from the church, he had heard Giulia's mother behind him, say to a friend, "He is such a good, kind man . . . You saw how deeply moved he was. . . . He loves her so much. . . . Really Giulia *couldn't* have found a better husband." And he had been pleased at having been able to inspire so satisfactory an illusion.

As he came to the end of these reflections, he was conscious of a sort of sharp, zealous impatience to reassume his role as a husband at the point at which he had left it after the wedding ceremony. He turned his eyes away from the window, that now—since night had fallen—was full of nothing but black, faintly glittering darkness, and looked out into the corridor in search of Giulia. He was aware of a slight feeling of irritation at her absence, and this gave him pleasure, for it seemed to him a sign of naturalness with which he was now playing his part. He wondered whether he ought to possess Giulia in the inconvenient sleeping berth or wait till they arrived at the end of the first stage of their journey. At this thought he was aware of a sudden, strong desire, and made up his mind to possess her in the train. That was the right thing to happen in such a case, he thought; besides, he felt strongly inclined to it, both from carnal appetite and from a kind of self-satisfied loyalty to his role as a husband. Giulia, however, was a virgin (a fact he knew for

certain) and to possess her would not be easy. He realized that he would be almost pleased if, after trying in vain to break her virginity, he was forced to wait for the hotel at S. and the convenience of a double bed. Such things happened to the newly wed—ridiculous though utterly normal—and he wanted to be like the most normal of the normal, even at the cost of appearing to be impotent.

He was on the point of going out into the corridor when the door opened and Giulia came in. She was in a skirt and blouse and had taken off her jacket, which she was carrying over her arm. Her comely bosom pressed exuberantly against the white linen of her blouse, infusing into it a faint, pinkish flesh-color; her face was radiant with joyous satisfaction; only her eyes, larger, softer, more languid than usual, seemed to reveal an amorous alarm, an almost frightened excitement. Marcello noticed all these things with complacency. Giulia was indeed the bride who prepares to surrender herself for the first time. She turned a little awkwardly (she always moved a little awkwardly, he thought, but it was an attractive awkwardness, like that of a healthy, innocent animal) in order to shut the door and pull down the curtain, and then, standing in front of him, tried to hang up her jacket on a hook beside the luggage rack. But the train was going very fast, and as it crossed a switch at full speed the whole car seemed to heel over and she fell on top of him. Cunningly, she corrected her fall and sat on his knees, putting her arms round his neck. Marcello felt the full weight of her body rest on his own thin legs, and automatically he placed his arm round her waist. She said, in a low voice, "D'you love me?" and at the same time lowered her face toward his, seeking his mouth with her own. They kissed lingeringly, while the train ran on at a high speed—the accomplice, so to speak, of their kiss, since at every jolt their teeth knocked together and Giulia's nose seemed anxious to penetrate his face. At last they separated, and Giulia, without getting off his knee, conscientiously took a handkerchief from her bag and wiped his lips, saying, "You've got about half a pound of lipstick on your mouth." Marcello, stiff in the legs, took advantage of

another jolt of the train to slide her heavy body away from him on to the seat. "You naughty creature," she said, "don't you want me?"

"They still have to come and make up the beds," said Marcello, rather embarrassed.

"Just fancy," she went on without any transition, looking all round her, "it's the first time I've ever traveled in a sleeping car."

Marcello could not help smiling at the simple way in which she spoke, and asked, "D'you like it?"

"Yes, I like it very much," she said, looking around again. "When do they come to get the beds ready?"

"Soon."

They were silent; and then Marcello looked at his wife and found that she, too, was looking at him, but with a changed expression—with timidity and apprehension, at least, although the vivid, happy expression of a few minutes before still lingered in her face. She saw he was looking at her and smiled as if to excuse herself, and then, without a word, put out her hand and pressed his. From her moist and loving eyes two tears slipped down his cheeks, followed by two more. Giulia went on looking at him as she wept, trying all the time, pitifully, to smile through her tears. At last, with sudden impetuosity, she bent down and started wildly kissing his hand. Marcello was disconcerted by this weeping. Giulia was by nature cheerful and not very sentimental, and it was the first time he had seen her in tears. But she gave him no time to come to any conclusion, for she sat up and said hurriedly: "Forgive my crying like this . . . but I was thinking that you're so much better than I am and that I'm not worthy of you."

"Now you're starting to talk like your mother," said Marcello smiling.

She blew her nose and then replied calmly, "No, Mum, I say these things without knowing why she says them . . . But I have a good reason."

"What reason?"

She looked at him for some time and then explained: "I've got to tell you something, and afterwards perhaps

you won't love me any more. . . . But I've got to tell you."

"What is it?"

She answered slowly, looking at him closely as though she wanted to catch the very first sign of the scornful expression she feared. "I'm not what you think I am," she said.

"What d'you mean?"

"I'm not. . . . Well, in fact, I'm not a virgin."

Marcello looked at her and suddenly understood that the normal character which he had hitherto attributed to his wife did not, in reality, exist. He did not know what was concealed behind this incipient confession, but he knew now for certain that Giulia, according to what she herself had said, was not what he had thought. There came over him a premonitory feeling of satiety at the idea of what he was going to hear, and a desire, almost, to refuse to listen to her confidences. But the first thing to do was to reassure her; and this was easy for him, because whether that famous virginity of hers existed or not did not really matter to him in the least. He replied in an affectionate voice, "Don't worry . . . I married you because I was fond of you, not because you were a virgin."

Giulia shook her head and said: "I knew you had a modern mentality . . . and that you wouldn't make a fuss about it . . . But I had to tell you, all the same."

"A modern mentality," Marcello could not help thinking with some amusement. The phrase was like Giulia herself, and made up for the absent virginity. It was an innocent phrase, though its innocence was not quite the kind he would have expected. Taking her hand, he said, "Come on, don't let's think about it any more," and he smiled at her.

Giulia smiled back at him. But again, while she was still smiling, tears filled her eyes and ran down her cheeks. Marcello protested. "Come, come . . . what's the matter now? . . . I've told you I don't mind."

Giulia's response was a singular one. She threw her arms around his neck and turned away her head, holding it against his chest and looking down so that Marcello

could not see her face. "I've got to tell you everything," she said.

"What d'you mean, everything?"

"Everything that happened to me."

"But it doesn't matter."

"Please let me. . . . It may be silly, but if I don't tell you I shall feel I'm hiding something from you."

"But why?" said Marcello, stroking her hair. "I suppose you had a lover . . . someone you thought you were fond of . . . or that you really were fond of. . . . Why do I have to know about it?"

"No, I wasn't fond of him," she answered at once, almost contemptuously, "and I never thought I was. . . . We were lovers more or less right up to the day when I got engaged to you. . . . But he wasn't a young man like you. . . . He was an old man of sixty—disgusting, and hard, and nasty, and exacting . . . a friend of the family—you know him."

"Who is it?"

"Fenizio, the lawyer," she said briefly.

Marcello gave a start. "But he was one of our witnesses. . . ."

"Yes, he insisted. . . . I didn't want him to be, but I couldn't refuse. . . . It was a wonder that he even allowed me to get married. . . ."

Marcello recalled that he had never cared for this lawyer Fenizio, whom he had very often met by chance at Giulia's home; he was a small, rather fair man, bald, with gold spectacles, a pointed nose that wrinkled up when he laughed, and a lipless mouth. A man, he also recalled, who was very calm and cold but who, within that same calmness and coldness, has his own unpleasant kind of aggressiveness and pugnance. He was strong, too: one hot day he had taken off his coat and rolled up his shirt-sleeves, showing thick, white arms bulging with muscles. "But whatever did you see in him?" he could not help exclaiming.

"It was he who saw something in me . . . and very early, too. . . . I was his mistress, not for a month or for a year, but for six years."

Marcello made a quick mental calculation. Giulia was

ted, "Six years?"

six years. . . . I was fifteen when . . . d'you understand?" Giulia, he noticed, although she was speaking in a tone which, to all appearances, still gave her pain, in the usual drawling, good-natured tone that she used for the most indifferent scraps of gossip. "He took care of me on the very day, more or less, that poor father died. . . . If it wasn't the very same day, it was the week. . . . As a matter of fact, I can tell you the date: just eight days after my father's funeral. . . . I remember, he was an intimate friend of my father's, and his trustee. . . ."

She paused for a moment, as if, by her silence, she wished to stress the impious behavior of the man; then she went on, "Mummy was doing nothing but weep at the thought of course going to church a great deal. . . . He came one evening when I was alone in the flat; Mummy was out and the maid was in the kitchen. . . . I was sitting at the table in my room, busy doing my homework. He was preparing for my exam at that time. . . . He came in on tiptoe and went around behind me, then bent over my exercise-book and asked me what I was doing. I told him, without turning around. I hadn't the slightest suspicion, in the first place because I was quite innocent—you can believe me when I say I was innocent as a five-year-old child—and also because he was like a relation. . . . I used to call him 'Uncle,' just fancy! . . . Then, I told him I was preparing my Latin exercise, and he—d'you know what he did?—he took hold of me by the hair, with one hand, but very firmly. . . . He often did that, for a joke, because I had splendid hair, long and dark, and he said his fingers couldn't resist it. . . . When he was pulling, I still thought it was a joke and said to him, 'Let me go, you're hurting'—but instead of letting me go, he forced me to get up and holding me at arm's length, he steered me toward the bed, which was in the corner near the door, as it still is . . . I—just imagine—I was completely innocent, I still didn't understand . . . I said to him, I remember, 'Let me go, I've got to do

my exercise.' At that moment he did let go of my hair . . . but no, I can't tell you. . . ."

Marcello was on the point of asking her to continue, thinking that she was ashamed; but Giulia, who had stopped metely in order to time her effects, resumed. "Although I wasn't yet fifteen, I was already very well developed, almost like a grown-up woman. . . . I didn't want to tell you because just to speak of it still hurts me. . . . He let go of my hair and squeezed me against his chest, but so hard that I couldn't even manage to scream and I almost fainted . . . perhaps I really did faint. . . . And then, after that embrace, I don't know what happened. I was lying on the bed and he was on top of me and I had understood everything, and all my strength had left me and I was just like an inanimate object in his hands, passive and inert and without any will power . . . and so he did just what he wanted with me. . . . Later I cried, and then, to comfort me, he told me he loved me, that he was mad about me—you know, the usual things. . . . But he also told me, in case I hadn't thoroughly understood, that I wasn't to say anything to Mummy unless I wanted him to ruin us. . . . Apparently Daddy, latterly, had made a mess of his affairs, and our material welfare now depended on *Liza*. . . . After that day he came back other times . . . but not regularly . . . always when I wasn't expecting him. . . . He used to come into my room on tiptoe, bend down over me and ask me in a severe voice: 'Have you done your exercise? No? . . . Well, come and do it with me, then.' And then, as usual, he would take me by my hair and conduct me at arm's length to the bed. . . . I tell you, he had an absolute passion for getting hold of my hair." She laughed, almost heartily, at the memory of this habit of her former lover's, as one laughs at some characteristic, amiable quality. "And so he went on for almost a year, continuing to swear that he loved me and that, if he hadn't had a wife and children, he would have married me . . . and I'm not saying he didn't mean it. . . . But if he had really been fond of me, as he said, there was only one way for him to show it—to leave me alone. . . . Anyhow, after a year, in desperation, I made an attempt to get rid of him: I told

didn't love him and would never love him, that I couldn't go on in that way, that I couldn't get anything done and was in a bad state and hadn't passed my exam, and that if he didn't let me alone I would have to give up my studies altogether. . . . And then he—just imagine—he went and told Mummy that he understood my character and was convinced that I wasn't cut out for intellectual study and that, I was now sixteen, the best thing would be for me to get a job. . . . To start off with, he offered me a post as secretary in his office. . . . D'you see? . . . Of course I resisted as hard as I could, but poor darling Mummy said I was being ungrateful, that he had been, and still was, such a help to us, that I mustn't miss such a fine opportunity; and so, in the end, I was forced to accept. . . . Once I was in his office and with him all day long, there was no possibility of stopping, as you may imagine . . . and so I began again, and finally he got me into the habit of it, and I gave up protesting. . . . You know how it is: I felt there was no hope for me any more and became fatalistic. . . . But when, a year ago, you told me you were fond of me, I went straight to him and said to him that, this time, the whole thing was really finished. . . . He protested, vile creature that he is, and threatened to go to you and tell you the whole story. . . . So d'you know what I did? I picked up a sharp paper cutter that lay on his desk and held the point of it to his throat, and I said, 'If you do that, I'll kill you'; and then I went on, 'He shall know about our relations, it's only right that he should. . . . But I'm going to be the one to tell him, not you. . . . From now on you simply don't exist for me . . . and if you make the slightest attempt to come between him and me I'll kill you. . . . I'll go to prison for it but I'll kill you.' I said this in a tone that made him realize I meant it . . . and from then on he never breathed another word—except when he tried to get back at me by writing that anonymous letter in which he spoke of your father. . . ."

"Ah, so that's who it was," Marcello could not help exclaiming.

"Of course. . . . I recognized the paper at once and typing too." She was silent for a moment, and then, in

sudden anxiety, took Marcello's hand and added: "Now I've told you everything and I feel better. . . . But perhaps I ought not to have told you, perhaps now you won't be able to endure me any more, perhaps you'll hate me."

Marcello did not answer, but remained silent for a long time. Giulia's tale had aroused in his mind neither hatred for the man who had abused her nor pity for her, who had endured that abuse. The very manner in which she had told her story—passionless and sensible, even when she was expressing repugnance or contempt—excluded any feelings so decided as hatred or pity. And so he himself, as it were by contagion, was inclined to regard the matter in a not dissimilar light, with a mixture of indulgence and resignation. He felt, if anything, an entirely physical amazement, unconnected with any sort of criticism—like falling into an unexpected void. And, as a reaction, he was aware of a sharpening of his habitual melancholy at being confronted with this unforeseen confirmation of a rule of decadence to which he had hoped, for a moment, that Giulia might be an exception. Yet his conviction of the profoundly normal character of Giulia's whole personality remained unaffected. Normality, he suddenly realized, did not consist so much in holding aloof from certain experiences as in the standard by which one judged them. Chance had willed that both he and Giulia had had something in their lives to conceal, and, consequently, to confess. But whereas he himself felt utterly incapable of speaking about Lino, Giulia, on the other hand, had not hesitated to reveal to him her relations with the lawyer, choosing for this revelation, the moment which, according to her ideas, was most suitable—the moment of their marriage, which she felt should wipe out the past and open up for her an entirely new way of life. This thought gave him pleasure because in spite of everything it confirmed Giulia's normality, which lay in her ability to indemnify herself by the customary, ancient methods of religion and the affections. Distracted by these reflections, he turned his eyes towards the window and did not notice how alarmed his wife was at his silence. Then he felt her trying to embrace him, and her voice asking him, "You don't say anything."

then . . . you're disgusted with me . . . The truth is that you can't bear me any more and you're disgusted at me."

Marcello wanted to reassure her, and he made a movement to take her in his arms. But he was thwarted by a violent jerk of the train, so that, without meaning to, he struck her in the face with his elbow. Giulia interpreted this involuntary blow as a gesture of rebuff and immediately rose to her feet. The train entered a tunnel with a long mournful whistle and a thickening of the darkness at the window. Through the clatter, redoubled by the echo of the tunnel, he seemed to catch the sound of a sob from Giulia as, with arms outstretched, she swayed and stumbled towards the door of the compartment. He was surprised and, without getting up, called to her. "Giulia." Her only answer was to open the door and disappear into the corridor, still swaying and stumbling in that distressing manner.

For a moment he sat still, then suddenly alarmed, rose and followed her out. Their compartment was in the middle of the coach, and he saw his wife hurrying along the deserted corridor in the direction of the vestibule. As he saw her moving swiftly over the thick, soft carpet between the mahogany walls, the words she had spoken to her former lover flashed across his mind: "If you say anything I'll kill you!" and he thought he had perhaps been ignorant of one aspect of her character and had mistaken her good nature for sloth. At the same moment he saw her bend down and fumble with the handle of the door. Darting forward, he seized her by the arm and pulled her back.

"What on earth are you doing, Giulia?" he asked in a low voice, through the clatter of the train. "What did you think . . . ? It was the train. . . . I meant to turn round and instead I bumped into you."

She stiffened as he put his arms round her, as though she intended to struggle. But, at the quiet, sincerely surprised tone of his voice, she seemed to calm down suddenly. After a moment, bending her head, she said: "I'm sorry, perhaps I made a mistake, but I had the impression that you hated me, so I just wanted to make an end

of everything . . . It wasn't a gesture; if you hadn't arrived I should have really done it."

"But why? . . . Whatever had come into your head?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Well, to cut a long story short . . . Getting married, for me, was a far more important thing than you think . . . When I decided you couldn't bear me any more, I thought, there's nothing else to be done . . ." She shrugged her shoulders again and added, raising her face toward him with a smile, "just think, you would have been left a widower almost before you were married."

Marcello looked at her for a moment without speaking. Evidently Giulia was sincere; it was perfectly true that she had attached a far greater importance to marriage than he had imagined possible. And he understood, then, with a feeling of astonishment, that her humble remark was an indication of her complete participation in the nuptial rite, which for her—unlike himself—had been what it truly ought to have been, neither more nor less. So it was not surprising that, after a self-surrender so impassioned, she should have thought, at the first disillusionment, of killing herself. He told himself that this was almost a piece of blackmail on Giulia's part: either you forgive me or I shall kill myself; and once again he was conscious of relief at finding her so like what he had wished her to be. Giulia had turned away again and appeared to be gazing at the window. He put his arm round her waist and murmured in her ear, "You know I love you."

She turned at once and kissed him with a passion so impetuous that Marcello was almost frightened. That was the way, he thought, in which pious women in churches sometimes kissed crosses, or reliefs, or the feet of statues. The clatter of the tunnel had meanwhile died down into the usual swift, rhythmic sound of wheels in the open air; and they separated.

They stood there side by side in front of the window, hand in hand, passing into the darkness of the night. "Look," said Giulia at last, in her normal voice, "look over there . . . What can it be? A house on fire?"

There was indeed a fire, like a shining red flower

the middle of the dark pane of glass. "I daresay it is," said Marcello, and lowered the window. As the mirror-like brightness of the glass was withdrawn from the outside darkness, the cool wind of the train's motion blew into his face, but the red flower remained, hanging mysteriously in the blackness of night, whether far or near, high or low, it was impossible to tell. Then, after staring for some time at the four or five petals of fire that seemed to be moving and throbbing, he turned his eyes to the bank beside the railway, along which the feeble lights of the train were running, together with his own and Giulia's shadows. Suddenly he was conscious of a sensation of acute bewilderment. Why was he in this train? And who was the woman standing beside him? And where was he going? And who indeed was he? And where had he come from? He did not suffer as a result of this bewilderment; on the contrary, it was pleasing to him as a feeling already familiar which perhaps also constituted the very background of his most intimate being. "I'm just like that fire over there in the darkness," he thought coldly. "I shall flare up and then die down again without reason and without result . . . just a little piece of destruction hanging in the blackness of night."

He started at Giulia's voice informing him, "Look, they've evidently made up our beds," and he realized that, while he himself had been lost in contemplation of that distant fire, for her there remained simply the question of their love; or rather, to be more exact, the approaching union of their two bodies. She was concerned, in fact, with what she was doing at the moment and nothing else. She had already walked off, not without a kind of repressed impatience, toward their compartment and Marcello followed some distance behind her. He paused a moment in the doorway to allow the conductor to come out, and then went in. Giulia was standing in front of the mirror and, regardless of the door being still open, was taking off her blouse, unbuttoning it from the bottom to the top. Without turning round, she said to him: "You take the top berth, and I'll have the bottom one." Marcello closed the door, climbed up into his berth and immediately started undressing, putting his clothes in the

splendid brilliance of June over sky and sea. It was a typical Riviera hotel room, high, white, with blue plaster decorations in the form of flowers and stalks and leaves, light-colored wooden furniture in the same floral style as the plasterwork, and, in one corner, a big green palm. When he was dressed, he tiptoed to the window, pushed the shutters slightly apart and looked out. There was the wide, smiling expanse of the sea, made vast by the perfect clearness of the violet-blue horizon that seemed, as a faint breeze passed over it, to be lit up, wave after wave, by a tiny sparkling flower of sunlight. Marcello lowered his eyes from the sea to the promenade. It was deserted; no one was sitting on the benches in the shade of the palm trees facing the sea, no one was walking along the gray, clean asphalt. He examined this view for some time, then closed the shutters again and turned to look at Giulia as she lay on the bed. She was naked and asleep. The position of her body as she lay on her side brought into prominence the pale, ample roundness of her hips from which the upper part of her body seemed to hang limp and lifeless, like the stem of a wilting plant from its vase. The back and hips, as Marcello knew, were the only firm, solid part of that body; on the farther side of it, invisible to him now but present to his memory, was the softness of her belly, flowing over, in tender folds, on to the bed, and of her breasts, dragged down by their weight, one over the other. Her head, hidden by her shoulder, could not be seen; and Marcello, remembering that he had possessed his wife a few minutes before, had the feeling that he was looking not at a real person but at a machine made of flesh, beautiful and lovable but brutal, made for love and for nothing else. As if his pitiless stare had waked her, she suddenly stirred and sighed deeply, and then said, in a clear voice, "Marcello." He stepped quickly to her side, answering affectionately, "Here I am." She turned over, transferring from one side to the other her cumbrous weight of female flesh, lifted her arms blindly and clasped them round his hips. Then with her hair falling over her face, she slowly, tenaciously rubbed her nose and mouth against him, seeking his groin. She kissed him there, with a kind of humble, pas-

sionate fetishism, paused a moment, motionless, her arm still around him, then fell back on the bed, overcome with sleep, her hair covering her face. And now she was asleep again, in the same position as before, except that she had changed from her right to her left side. Marcello took his coat from its peg, tiptoed to the door and went out into the passage.

He went down the wide, echoing staircase and out through the door of the hotel on to the promenade. For a moment he was dazzled by the sunlight reflected in flashing points from the surface of the sea. He closed his eyes, and then, as though his senses had been revived by darkness, he was struck by a sharp smell of horse-urine. There was a row of three or four cabs there, standing in a patch of shade behind the hotel, white covers on their seats, their drivers asleep on the box. Marcello went to the first of them and jumped in, calling out the address: "Via dei Glicini." He noticed that the driver threw him a quick, meaningful glance before, without speaking a

though at something unworthy he ought not to have done. Feeling sick at heart, he went up the two or three steps, pushed open the glass door, letting loose a jingling mechanism of bells, and found himself in a Pompeian hall, facing a staircase with a wooden banister. He recognized the sickly smell of face powder, sweat and summer. The house was immersed in silence and summer afternoon torpor. As he was looking around, there appeared from somewhere or other a sort of maidservant, dressed black with a white apron tied round her waist. She was small and slim, and her sharp, ferret-like face was enlivened by two brilliant eyes. She came towards him with shrill "Good-day" uttered in the gayest of tones. "I want to speak to the proprietress," he said, taking off his hat with perhaps excessive politeness. "All right, pretty boy, you shall speak to her," replied the woman, speaking in the local dialect; "but in the meantime you'd better go into the drawing room . . . The proprietress will come to you . . . Go in there." Marcello, irritated both by the familiar way of speaking to him and by the misunderstanding, nevertheless allowed himself to be pushed towards a half open door. He saw, in an uneven half-light, a long, rectangular, empty room, with a row of red upholstered divans all round the walls. The floor was dusty, like that of a station waiting room; the worn and dirty stuff of the divans, too, suggested the dreariness of a public place within the intimacy and secrecy of a private house. Marcello, uncertain what to do, sat down on one of the divans. At the same moment—like the sudden unburdening of bowels long unmoved—he could hear through the house a sort of disintegration, a patter of sound, the precipitate rush of feet down the wooden staircase. And then the thing that he had feared happened. The door opened and the peevish voice of the maid announced, "Here are the young ladies . . . all for you." Lazily, unwillingly they came in, some of them half-dressed, some more or less dressed, two of them dark and three fair, three of middling height one decidedly small and one enormous. The latter came and sat down beside Marcello, flopping down on the divan with a sigh of exhausted satisfaction. At first he turned away his face

men, fascinated, moved slightly round again and looked at her. She was truly enormous, pyramidal in shape, her hips broader than her waist, her waist broader than her shoulders and her shoulders broader than her head, the latter being extremely small, with a snub-nosed face and a tress of black hair twisted round her forehead. A yellow silk brassiere supported her low, swelling breasts; below her navel a red skirt hung wide open like the curtain of a theatre, displaying the dark groin and the massive white thighs. Seeing that she was being looked at, she smiled suggestively to one of her companions who was sitting against the opposite wall, heaved a sigh, and then passed her hand between her legs as though to pull them apart into a less hot position. Marcello, offended by this little immodesty, would have liked to pull away the hand with which she was rubbing herself underneath her belly; but he had not the energy to move. The thing that struck him most in these female cattle was the irreparable quality of their degradation. It was the same thing that made him shudder with horror in face of his mother's nudity and his father's madness, and was at the source of his

Come with me, sir . . . I'll show you the way . . . You're expected, sir."

He preceded Marcello through the glass door and into the garden. One behind the other, they walked down the path between the hedges and turned round behind the house. The sun was scorching in this part of the garden, with a dry, sharp heat of dust and vegetation run wild. Marcello noticed that all the shutters of the villa were closed, just as though it were uninhabited; and the garden, too, was full of weeds and appeared to be abandoned. The Secret Service man was now making for a low, white building that took up the whole of the far end of the garden. Marcello remembered having noticed little houses like this, at the bottoms of gardens behind villas of this kind in other watering places. In summer the owners would let the villa and retire into them, restricting themselves to a couple of rooms in order to make money. Orlando opened the door without knocking and stuck his head in, announcing, "Here is Doctor Clerici."

Marcello walked forward and found himself in a small room fitted up, in a summary sort of way, as an office. The air was thick with smoke. A man was sitting at the table, his hands joined and his face turned toward him. The man was an albino. His face had the glowing, rosy transparency of alabaster, and was flecked with yellow freckles. His blue eyes, inflamed and almost red, with white lashes, were like those of certain wild animals that live among the polar snows. Accustomed as Marcello was to the disconcerting contrast between the dull bureaucratic style and the often ferocious tasks of many of his Secret Service colleagues, he could not help saying to himself that this man, at any rate, was perfectly suited to his position. There was more than cruelty in that spectral countenance—a kind of ruthless fury, almost, that was yet kept within bounds by the conventional rigidity of his military bearing. After a moment of embarrassing immobility, the man rose brusquely to his feet, revealing the shortness of his stature. "My name is Gabrio," he said. Then he immediately sat down and went on in an ironical tone, "So here you are, at last, Doctor Clerici."

His voice was metallic and disagreeable. Marcello, with-

out waiting to be asked, also sat down and said, "Yes, I arrived this morning."

"I did, in fact, expect you this morning."

Marcello hesitated. Should he tell him that he was on his honeymoon? He decided not to, and concluded quietly, "It wasn't possible for me to come earlier."

"So I see," said the man. He pushed the box of cigarettes toward Marcello with an ungracious "Do you smoke?" then lowered his head and started reading a sheet of paper lying on the table. "They leave me here, in this house which may be hospitable but isn't in the least secret, without information, without directives, practical-

without money . . . ah, here it is." He went on reading for some time, then raised his head and added, "They told you in Rome to come and see me, didn't they?"

"Yes, the same man that brought me here just now and notified me that I was to break my journey here and come and see you."

"Yes, exactly." Gabrio took the cigarette from his mouth and put it carefully down on the edge of the ash tray. "At the last moment, it appears, they changed their minds . . . The program is altered."

Marcello did not blink an eyelid; but a wave of indefinable relief and hope rushed over him exhilaratingly. Perhaps he would now be allowed to simplify his journey, to reduce it to its ostensible motives of Paris and a honeymoon. He said, however, in a clear voice, "What does that mean?"

"It means that the plan is modified and, consequently, your mission also," continued Gabrio. "This man Quadri was to have been watched, you were to have got in touch with him, gained his confidence, even got him to entrust you with some commission or other . . . Now in my last communication from Rome, Quadri is specified as a troublesome person, to be suppressed." Gabrio took up his cigarette again, inhaled a mouthful of smoke, and replaced it in the ash tray. "In fact," he explained, in a more conversational tone, "your mission is reduced to practically nothing . . . All you have to do is to get in touch with Quadri, availing yourself of the fact that you knew him already, and then point him out to this man

Orlando, who will also be going to Paris . . . You can invite him, for instance, to some public place where Orlando will also be—a café, a restaurant . . . All that's needed is for Orlando to see him with you, to make certain of his identity . . . That's all that's asked of you now . . . Then you can devote yourself to your honeymoon exactly as you like."

So Gabrio too knew about his honeymoon, thought Marcello, astonished. But this first thought, he at once realized, was nothing but a hastily assumed mask by means of which his mind sought to conceal from itself its own agitation. In reality Gabrio had revealed to himself nothing more important than knowledge of his honeymoon—the decision to suppress Quadri. With a violent effort he forced himself to make an objective examination of this extraordinary, this lamentable piece of news. And he immediately established, in his own mind, one fundamental fact. In order to suppress Quadri, his own presence in Paris, his own co-operation, were not in any way necessary. Orlando could perfectly well find and identify his victim by himself. The truth of the matter was, he thought, that they wanted to involve him in an effective, though unnecessary complicity, to compromise him utterly and for all. As for the alteration in the plan, there was not the slightest doubt but that it was merely apparent. The plan just propounded by Gabrio had of course been already decided on and worked out in all its details at the time of his visit to the Ministry; and the apparent alteration had been due to a characteristic desire to divide and confuse responsibility. Neither he nor, probably, Gabrio, had received written orders; thus, in case of unfavorable developments, the Ministry would be able to proclaim its own innocence; and the blame for the murder would fall on him, on Gabrio, on Orlando, and on the other immediate participants.

He hesitated, and then, to gain time, objected, "I can't see that Orlando has any need of me in order to find Quadri . . . I think he's actually in the telephone book."

"Those are the orders," said Gabrio with almost breathless haste, as if he had foreseen Marcello's objection.

Marcello lowered his head. He realized that he had

been enticed into a kind of trap, and that, having put out one finger, he was now, through a subterfuge, caught by the whole arm; but, strangely, once the first shock of surprise was over, he found that he felt no real repugnance at the change of plan—nothing more, in fact, than an obstinate, melancholy resignation in the face of a duty which, though it increases in unpleasantness, yet remains unchanged and unavoidable. Probably the Secret Service agent Orlando had no knowledge of the inside mechanism of this duty, but he himself had—and that was all the difference between them. Neither he nor Orlando could evade what Gabrio called "orders," that were in fact personal situations that had now been firmly established, outside which, for both of them, lay nothing but disorder and irregularity. At last he looked up and said, "All right then . . . And where am I to find Orlando, in Paris?"

Gabrio looked down at the same sheet of paper on the table, and replied, "You tell me where you'll be staying . . . then Orlando will come and see you."

So, they did not quite trust him, and anyhow did not consider it opportune to give him the man's address in Paris. He mentioned the name of the hotel where he would be staying, and Gabrio made a note of it at the bottom of the paper. He went on, in a more affable tone, as though to indicate that the official part of the visit was over, "Have you ever been to Paris?"

"No, this is the first time."

"I was there for two years before I ended up in this hole here," said Gabrio with characteristic bureaucratic bitterness. "Once you've been in Paris even Rome seems like a village . . . And imagine a place like this!" He lit a cigarette from the butt of the other, and added, with empty boastfulness, "In Paris I was in clover . . . A flat, a car, lots of friends, affairs with women . . . As far as that goes, you know, Paris is ideal."

Marcello, though it went against the grain, felt that he ought to respond to Gabrio's affability in some way. So he said, "But with this house here, just across the way, you shouldn't be bored."

Gabrio shook his head. "Pooh, how could one think of amusing oneself with those lumps of meat for only ten con-

scripts, at so much a pound? . . . No," he added, "one's only resource here is the Casino . . . D'you gamble?"

"No, never."

"It's interesting, all the same," said Gabrio, pulling himself back in his chair, as though to indicate that the interview was finished. "Fortune may smile upon anyone, on you just as much as on me. . . It's not for nothing that she's a woman. . . The important thing is to grab hold of her when you can." He rose, went to the door and threw it open. He was indeed very small, Marcello observed, with short legs; the upper part of his body was stiffly enclosed in a green jacket of military cut. Gabrio stood there for a moment looking at Marcello, in a ray of sunlight that seemed to accentuate the transparency of his pink, glowing skin; then he said, "I don't suppose we shall meet again. . . On your return from Paris you'll be going straight back to Rome."

"Yes, almost certainly."

"Is there anything you need?" Gabrio asked, suddenly and unwillingly. "Have they provided you with funds? . . . I haven't much with me here . . . but if you need anything. . ."

"No thanks, I don't need anything."

"Well, good luck, then—and into the lion's mouth!"

They shook hands and Gabrio hastily closed the door. Marcello walked away toward the gate.

But as he was going down the path, he realized that, in his hurried flight from the drawing room, he had left his hat there. He hesitated, loth to go back into that room that stank of shoes and face powder and sweat, and fearing, besides, the jests and the flattery of the women. Then he made up his mind, turned back and pushed open the door, letting loose the usual tinkle of bells.

This time nobody appeared, neither the ferret-faced maid nor any of the girls. But, through the open door of the big room, he heard the well-known, loud, good-natured voice of Orlando; and, feeling encouraged, he looked into the room.

It was empty, except for Orlando, who was sitting in the corner by the door beside a woman whom Marcello did not remember having noticed among those who had ap-

peared at his first entry. The Secret Service man had his arm round her waist, in an awkward, confidential attitude, and he did not trouble to change his position at Marcello's appearance. Embarrassed, vaguely irritated, the latter turned away his eyes from Orlando and looked at the woman.

She was sitting in a rigid attitude, as though she wished some way to repel her companion, or at least to keep him at a distance. She was dark, with a high, white forehead, bright eyes, a long, thin face and a large mouth enlivened by dark-colored lipstick and she wore a scornful expression. She was dressed in an almost normal manner, in a white evening dress, low at the neck and sleeveless, whose only meretricious device was that the skirt was split almost up to the waist so as to display her belly and her crossed legs, long, slim and elegant, with a chaste beauty like the legs of a dancer. She held a lighted cigarette between two fingers but she was not smoking; her hand rested on the arm of the sofa and the smoke rose into the air. Her other hand lay quietly on Orlando's knee. It might as well have been lying, thought Marcello, on the faithful head of a large dog. But what struck him most forcibly about her was her forehead, and not so much its whiteness as its appearance of being illumined in a mysterious way by the intense expression of the eyes, with a purity of light that made him think of one of those chaplets of diamonds that women used to wear, on great occasions, at balls. Marcello continued to gaze at her for some time in astonishment, and as he gazed he was conscious of a painful, indescribable feeling of regret and disdain. Meanwhile Orlando, intimidated by this persistent stare, had risen to his feet.

"My hat," said Marcello. The woman had remained seated, and was now, in turn, gazing at him, but without curiosity. Orlando hurried assiduously across the room to fetch the hat from a divan on the far side. And then, suddenly, Marcello understood why it was that the sight of the woman had aroused in him that painful feeling of regret. The truth, he realized, was that he did not want her to do what Orlando desired, and seeing her submit to his embrace had made him suffer, though

sing some intolerable profanation. Of course she knew nothing of the light that shone on her brow—which in any case did not belong to her any more than beauty, in general, is the property of a beautiful person. Yet he felt it almost his duty to prevent her demeaning that shining brow in order to satisfy the erotic caprices of Orlando.

For one moment it occurred to him to make use of his authority in order to get her out of the room. He would engage her in conversation for a short time, and then, as soon as he could be sure that Orlando had chosen another woman, he would go away. He also had the crazy idea of carrying her away from the brothel and giving her the chance of another sort of life. But, even as he had these thoughts, he realized that they were foolish fancies. It was impossible that she should not be like her companions like them irreparably and, as it were, innocently ruined and lost. Then he felt a touch on his arm; Orlando was in the act of handing him his hat. Automatically he took it.

But Orlando had had time to reflect on that curious stare of Marcello's. He stepped forward, and, pointing to the woman in much the same way as he might have pointed out something in the way of food or drink to an honored guest, made a suggestion to him. "If you wish, sir, you like this woman . . . I can wait."

At first Marcello did not understand. Then he saw the smile on Orlando's face, at the same time both respectful and knowing, and felt himself blushing up to the ears. Since Orlando was not retiring, he was merely yielding first place to him, from politeness as a friend as well as from discipline as an inferior—just as he might at a bar or buffet table. Marcello said hurriedly, "You're crazy, Orlando . . . You do just as you like, I must go."

"Very well, sir," said Orlando with a smile. Marcello saw him beckon to the woman, and to his distress saw her rise at once, obedient to the signal, and—tall, erect, the diadem of light on her brow—walk over to him without hesitation or protest, with perfect professional simplicity. Orlando said to Marcello, "We shall meet again soon, sir," and he stepped aside to allow the woman to pass. Marcello, almost in spite of himself, drew back; and she

walked between them, in a leisurely way, cigarette in her fingers. But when she was in front of Marcello she stopped for an instant and said: "If you want me, my name is Luisa." Her voice, as he had feared, was coarse and harsh, without any gentleness in it; and Luisa thought it necessary to follow up her words with a gesture supposed to be flattering, putting out her tongue and licking her upper lip. Marcello felt that words and gesture relieved him, to a certain extent, of his regret at having failed to prevent her going off with Orlando. The woman, meanwhile, still leading the way, had reached the staircase. She threw her cigarette on the floor, stamped it out, and, raising her skirt with both hands, started quickly up the stairs, closely followed by Orlando. Finally they disappeared round the corner of the landing above. Somebody else—probably another of the girls and a client—was now coming downstairs. Marcello could hear their chatter. Hurriedly he left the house.

CHAPTER 10

HAVING asked the hotel porter to get Quadri's number on the telephone, Marcello went and sat down in a corner of the lounge. It was a big hotel and the lounge was very spacious, with arches supported on pillars, groups of arm-chairs, showcases in which expensive objects were displayed, writing-desks and tables. Numbers of people were coming and going between the entrance and the elevator, the porter's desk and the manager's office, the door of the restaurant and the other public rooms beyond the pillars. Marcello would have liked to amuse himself, as he waited, with the spectacle of this gay, swarming lounge, but his mind, dragged down to the depths of memory by his present distress, turned back, almost against his will, to the first and only visit that he had paid years before. Marcello had been a student and Quadri his tutor; and he had

d red building not far from the station to consult him about a thesis for his doctor's degree. At the moment he entered, Marcello had been struck by the enormous quantity of books piled up in every room of the flat. Even in the hall he had noticed old curtains which appeared to conceal doors. But when he pulled them back, he had discovered rows and rows of books in the alcoves of the walls. The maid had led him down an extremely narrow, tortuous passage that seemed to go round the back of the building, and the passage was lined on both sides with shelves of books and papers. When he had come down into Quadri's study, Marcello had found a room whose four walls were closely packed with books, from floor to ceiling. There were more books on the desk, arranged one on top of the other in piles between which the bearded face of the owner of the flat peeped out as though through a loophole. Marcello had at once noticed that Quadri had a long, thin, slightly flat, asymmetrical face, like a papier-mâché mask, with red-rimmed eyes and a triangular nose to the right of which a beard and a pair of false mustaches were carelessly stuck on in a summary manner. On his forehead, too black and with a look of damage, was the impression of a badly fitting wig. Between the wig and the mustache and his broomlike beard, both of which had the same aspect blackness, one caught a glimpse of a mouth with lips of no particular shape. And he had been forced to the conclusion that all this hair and beard and wig and mustache and broomlike beard, all this contributed hair probably concealed some kind of defect, such as a lack of chin or a frightful scar. It was not a face, and nothing real or reliable about it, a face which was everything was false, a veritable mask. The person who had come to welcome Marcello, and, in doing so, had emphasized the shortness of his stature and the hump—or, at least, the deformation of the left shoulder—that added a certain stressing quality to his excessively gentle and unassuming manners. As he shook Marcello's hand beneath the piles of books, Quadri had looked at his visitor through his thick-rimmed glasses in a thoughtful way over his thick lenses, so that Marcello had had the momentary impression that he was being examined, but he had not been able to say anything.

ed style of Quadri's clothes—a sort of frock coat, black with silk facings, black striped trousers, a white shirt with starched collar and cuffs, a gold watchchain across waistcoat. Marcello had no liking for Quadri: he knew him to be an anti-Fascist, and Quadri's anti-fascism, his unwarlike, unhealthy, unattractive appearance, his leaning, his books, everything about him went to make up in Marcello's mind the conventional picture, continually pointed at in scorn by Party propaganda, of the negative, impotent intellectual. And, in addition, Quadri's extraordinary gentleness was repugnant to Marcello, who felt there must be something false about it: it seemed to him impossible that a man could be so gentle without deceitfulness and without ulterior motives.

Quadri had welcomed Marcello with his customary expressions of exaggerated affection. There were constant interjections of such phrases as "My boy," or "My dear boy," as he waved his little white hands about over the books; and he had begun by asking a quantity of questions about Marcello's family and about himself personally. When he heard that Marcello's father was shut up in a clinic for the insane, he had exclaimed, "Oh, my poor boy, I didn't know . . . What a misfortune, what a terrible misfortune! . . . And can science do nothing to restore his reason?" But he had not listened to Marcello's reply and had passed straight on to another subject. He had a throaty voice, modulated and harmonious, extremely sweet and full of anxious apprehensiveness. Ma-

changing his tone or showing any apparent reaction, how difficult it was for him, whose anti-Fascist feelings were so well known, to continue the teaching of such subjects as philosophy and history under a regime like that of the Fascists. At this point Marcello, in embarrassment, had tried to bring the conversation round to the object of his visit. But Quadri had immediately interrupted him. "Perhaps you will wonder why in the world I am telling you all these things. . . My dear boy, I am not talking idly nor to relieve my own personal feelings. . . I would not allow myself to waste the time that you ought to be devoting to your studies. . . I am telling you these things in order to justify, in some way, the fact that I am unable to concern myself either with you or with your thesis. I am giving up teaching."

"You're giving up teaching?" Marcello had repeated in surprise.

"Yes," Quadri had confirmed, passing his hand with his habitual gesture over his mouth and mustache. "Although it is a grief, a great grief, to me, since I have devoted my whole life to you young men, I find myself forced to resign my position." After a moment, without emphasis, the professor had added with a sigh, "Yes, yes, I have made up my mind to pass from thought to action. . . This phrase, perhaps, will not seem new to you, but it reflects my situation exactly."

Marcello had with difficulty refrained from smiling. Indeed he seemed to him a comic figure, this Professor Quadri, this little man in a frock coat, hunchbacked, short sighted, bearded, peering out at him from his high chair, between his piles of books, and declaring that he had made up his mind to pass from thought to action. There was, however, no doubt as to the meaning of the remark. Quadri, after years of passive opposition, shut in his own thoughts and his own profession, had decided to go over to active politics, perhaps to active plotting. Marcello, seized with a sudden, vehement dislike for him, had not been able to help warning him, in a cold, menacing manner, "You're making a mistake in telling me . . . I am a Fascist and I must protect you."

intimate sort of way, had answered, "I know you're a dear, good boy, a fine, honest boy, and that you'd never do a thing like that."

"Devil take him," Marcello had thought angrily. And he had answered, with perfect sincerity, "I might certainly do it. . . That's exactly what honesty means to us Fascists—reporting people like you and making it impossible for them to do any harm."

The professor had shaken his head. "My dear boy," he had said, "you know, even while you're speaking, that what you say isn't true. . . You know it, or rather, your heart knows it. . . And in point of fact you, honest young man that you are, took the step of warning me. . . Another—you know what he would have done, a real informer?—he would have pretended to approve of what I said, and then, once I had compromised myself by some thoroughly imprudent statement, he would have reported me. . . But you warned me."

"I warned you," Marcello had replied harshly, "because I don't believe you're capable of what you call action. . . Why can't you be satisfied with being a professor? . . . What action are you talking about?"

"What action? . . . Never mind," Quadri had answered, with a sly but intent look. Marcello, at these words, could not resist looking around at the walls, at the shelves full of books. Quadri had caught this look and, still in the gentlest possible way, had added, "it seems strange to you, doesn't it, that I should be talking of action? . . . Among all these books? . . . At this moment you're thinking, 'What sort of action is he babbling about, this little twisted, myopic, bearded hunchback?' . . . Now, truthfully, isn't that what you're thinking? . . . Your little Party newspapers have so often described to you the man who is both ignorant and incapable of taking action, the intellectual, and you can't help smiling with pity when you recognize him in me. . . Isn't that so?"

Surprised at such penetration, Marcello had exclaimed, "How did you come to guess that?"

"Oh, my dear boy," Quadri had replied, "I see, 'my dear boy, I guessed it at once. . . I

was convinced that Quadri, among so many qualities, lacked that of courage. This seemed to be proved by the fact that, although he thrust his followers into mortal dangers, he never, personally, exposed himself.

He was aroused with a start from these thoughts by the voice of one of the hotel pages who crossed the lounge rapidly, calling out his name. For a moment, deceived by the page's French pronunciation, he almost thought it must be someone else's name. But this "Monsieur Clerici" was, of course, himself—as he realized, with a slight feeling of nausea, when, pretending to himself that he really thought it was someone else, he tried to imagine what that person was like, a person with *his* face, *his* figure, *his* clothes. In the meantime the page was going away in the direction of the writing room, still calling his name. Marcello got up and went straight to the telephone booth.

He took up the receiver from the shelf and put it to his ear. A female voice, clear and slightly singsong, asked in French who was telephoning. Marcello answered, in the same language, "I'm an Italian. . . Clerici, Marcello Clerici. . . I should like to speak to Professor Quadri."

"He's very busy. . . I don't know if he can come. . . Did you say your name was Clerici?"

"Yes, Clerici."

"Wait one moment."

He heard the sound of the receiver being put down on the table, then footsteps receding, and finally there was silence. Marcello waited for some time, expecting a further sound of footsteps to announce the woman's return or the arrival of the professor. Instead of which, springing without warning from the depth of that utter silence, came the echoing voice of Quadri, "Hullo, Quadri here. . . Who's speaking?"

Marcello hastily explained: "My name is Marcello Clerici. . . . I was a student of yours, when you were teaching in Rome. . . I should like to see you."

"Clerici," repeated Quadri doubtfully. And then, after a moment, with decision, "Clerici: I don't know the name."

"Yes, you do, Professor," Marcello insisted. "I came to

to act, it doesn't mean that you have to have a gold eagle on your cap or braid on your sleeves. . . Well, good-bye, anyhow, good-bye, good-bye and good luck. . . Good-bye." With these words, gently, implacably, he had pushed Marcello toward the door.

And now Marcello, thinking over that meeting, realized that there had been a strong element of youthful inexperience and inexperience in his rash contempt for the unbacked, bearded, pedantic Quadri. Besides, his mistake had been proved by what had happened. Quadri, a few months after their interview, had fled to Paris and had soon become one of the principal anti-Fascist leaders perhaps the cleverest, the most wily, the most aggressive of all. His specialty, it seemed, was proselytism. Benefiting from his teaching experience and his knowledge of the youthful mind, he was often successful in converting young men who were indifferent, or even of contrary opinions, and then urging them to bold and dangerous undertakings which were almost always disastrous, if not to him, the inspirer, at any rate to their artless executants. He did not appear, however, as he flung these initiates into the conspiratorial struggle, to feel any of the humane anxieties that, in view of his character, one might have seen tempted to expect of him. On the contrary, he sacrificed them quite coolly in desperate actions that could be justified only as part of an extremely long-term plan and that, indeed, necessarily involved a cruel indifference to the value of human life. Quadri, in fact, possessed some of the rare qualities of the true politician—or at least of a certain category of politicians; he was astute and at the same time enthusiastic, intellectual yet active, frank yet cynical, thoughtful yet imprudent. Marcello, as part of his official work, had often been concerned with Quadri, who was described in police reports as an extremely dangerous element, and he had always been struck by his capacity for combining so many contrasting qualities in one single character, profound and ambiguous as it was. And now, gradually, from what he had managed to learn at the meeting and from information that was not always exact, he had changed his former contempt for an angry respect. His original dislike, however, still remained.

"Yes, of course, Orlando. . . You say where."

"You don't know Paris, sir . . . so I suggest place that's easy to find. . . The café at the corner of the Place de la Madeleine. . . Don't make a mistake—on the left as you come from the Rue Royale. . . It has lots of tables outside, but I'll be waiting for you inside. . . There won't be anyone inside."

"All right . . . what time?"

"I'm at the café already. . . But I'll wait as long as you like."

"In half an hour, then."

"That's fine, sir. . . In half an hour."

Marcello left the telephone booth and walked toward the elevator. But, just as he was going in, he heard, for the third time, the same page calling out his name. This time he was really surprised. He felt a vague hope that this might be some superhuman intervention, that, as he put his ear to the black receiver of the telephone, he might hear the voice of an oracle uttering some decisive word about his life. His heart in a flutter, he turned and went back to the telephone booth.

"Is that you, Marcello?" asked the languid, caressing voice of his wife.

"Oh, it's you!" he could not help exclaiming—whether with disappointment or relief, he could not have said.

"Yes, of course it is. . . . Who did you think it was?"

"It doesn't matter. . . . I was expecting a telephone call. . . ."

"What are you doing?" she asked, with an accent of melting tenderness.

"Nothing. . . I was just on the point of coming up to tell you I'm going out, and that I would be back in about an hour."

"No, don't come up. . . . I'm just going to have a bath. . . . All right then, I'll expect you in an hour's time, down in the lounge."

"It might be an hour and a half, even."

"All right, an hour and a half, then. . . . But please don't be longer."

"I said that so as not to keep you waiting . . . it'll probably be an hour."

see you a few days before you gave up teaching. . . wanted to discuss a subject for a thesis with you."

"One moment, Clerici," said Quadri. "Really I don't remember your name . . . but that doesn't mean you may not be right. . . And you want to see me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"For no particular reason," replied Marcello; "but, I was your pupil and as I've heard a good deal about you recently—I just wanted to see you, that's all."

"Well," said Quadri in a more yielding tone, "come and see me here at my flat."

"When can I come?"

"Today, if you like. . . In the afternoon . . . after lunch. . . Come and have some coffee . . . about three o'clock."

"I must tell you," put in Marcello, "I'm on my honeymoon . . . May I bring my wife?"

"But of course, naturally. . . Till later, then."

He rang off, and Marcello too, after a moment's reflection, replaced the receiver. Before he had had time to leave the telephone booth, the same page who had called out his name in the lounge reappeared and said, "You're wanted on the telephone."

"I've had my call already," said Marcello, starting to leave.

"No, someone else wants you."

He went back into the booth and took up the receiver again. A loud voice, good-natured and cheerful, immediately shouted into his ear, "Is that you, Doctor Clerici?"

Marcello recognized the voice of the Secret Service agent Orlando, and replied calmly, "Yes, it's me."

"Did you have a good journey, sir?"

"Yes, excellent."

"Is the Signora well?"

"Very well."

"And what do you think of Paris?"

"I haven't been outside the hotel yet," answered Marcello, slightly annoyed with this familiarity.

"Well, you'll see. . . Paris is Paris. . . Are we going to meet, sir?"

"Yes, of course, Orlando. . . You say where."

"You don't know Paris, sir . . . so I suggest place that's easy to find. . . The café at the corner of the Place de la Madeleine. . . Don't make a *mistake*—on the left as you come from the Rue Royale. . . It has lots of tables outside, but I'll be waiting for you inside. . . There won't be anyone inside."

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as it were, the invisible, swarming presence of the immense city lying beneath its vault. He looked down at the river: sunk between its sloping stone walls, with the clean quays along its sides. It looked, at this point, like a canal; the water, oily and sluggish, of a muddy green color, ringed the white piers of the nearest bridge with sparkling whirlpools. A black and yellow barge slipped swiftly, foamlessly, over the thick water, its funnel belching hasty puffs of smoke; in the bows two men were talking—one wearing a blue blouse, the other a white sleeve-vest. A fat, familiar sparrow perched on the parapet beside his arm, chirped in a lively manner as if to tell him something, then flew off again in the direction of the river. A young man who might have been a student, dressed, with a beret on his head and a book under his arm, attracted his attention. He was going in the direction of Notre Dame, in a leisurely way, stopping now and then to look at the books and the prints. Suddenly, however, he turned back. Marcello was struck by his own thought. In spite of all obligations that oppressed him, he had never met that young man, he thought. And suddenly, the sky, the trees, the whole of Paris would take on a different meaning for him. At the same moment he saw an empty taxi coming slowly along the boulevard. He was almost surprised to find himself signaling it to stop: one moment earlier he had not thought of doing anything. He jumped in, giving the address of the apartment where Orlando was awaiting him.

Sitting back on the cushions, he looked out at the view of Paris as the taxi carried him along. He noticed the look of the city—gray, old, but nevertheless smiling and graceful and full of an intelligent charm that seemed to blow in at the windows together with the fresh air of the taxi's motion. He liked the *gendarmes* at the crossroads, though he could not have said why. They seemed to him elegant, with their hard, round *kepys*, their short cloaks, their slim legs. One of them came to the window to say something to the driver. He was an antique-looking, pale, fair young man, and he held his hat between his teeth, while still keeping his arm, his white baton, stretched out behind him to hold

up the traffic. He liked the big horse chestnut trees that raised their branches toward the glistening window-panes of the old gray façades. He liked the old-fashioned shop signs with their white lettering, full of flourishes, on a brown or wine-red background. He liked even the unaesthetic pattern of the taxis and buses with hoods that looked like the muzzles of dogs running along sniffing the ground. The taxi, after a short halt, passed in front of the neo-classic temple of the Chamber of Deputies, crossed the bridge, and rushed at full speed towards the obelisk in the Place de la Concorde. This, then, he thought as he looked at the immense military-looking square, enclosed at the far side of its row of arcades like regiments of soldiers drawn up on parade, this, then, was the capital of France, of that France that had to be destroyed. He felt now that he had loved this city that lay before his eyes for a long time—long before that day, when he found himself there for the first time. And yet this admiration that he felt for the majestic, kindly, joyous beauty of the town emphasized to him the somber nature of the duty he was preparing to perform. Perhaps if Paris had been less beautiful, he thought, he might have evaded that duty, he might have escaped, have freed himself from the bonds of fate. But the beauty of the city established him firmly in his hostile, negative role—as did the many repugnant aspects of the cause he was serving. He realized, as he thought over these things, that he had found a way of explaining to himself the absurdity of his own position. And he knew that he explained it in that way because there was no other way of explaining it and so of accepting it freely and consciously.

The taxi stopped and Marcello got out in front of the café appointed by Orlando. The rows of tables on the pavement were crowded, as he had warned him they would be; but when he went inside the café, he found it deserted. Orlando was sitting at a table in a recess formed by a window. As soon as he saw him, he rose and beckoned to him.

Marcello walked across with the
opposite him. Through the v

backs of the people sitting outside in the shade of the trees, and beyond, part of the colonnade and of the triangular pediment of the church of the Madeleine. Marcello ordered coffee. Orlando waited till the waiter had gone away, and then said, "Perhaps you're thinking, sir, that you'll get an 'espresso' coffee the same as in Italy, but you're quite wrong. . . . Good coffee doesn't exist in Paris, as it does with us. . . You'll see what sort of a brew they'll bring you, sir."

Orlando spoke in his usual respectful, good-natured, quiet tone. "An honest face," thought Marcello, eyeing the Secret Service man closely while the latter, with a sigh, poured himself out some more of the despised coffee; "the face of a bailiff or a tenant farmer or a small country landowner." He waited till Orlando had drunk his coffee and then asked, "Where do you come from, Orlando?"

"Me? From the province of Palermo, sir."

Marcello, for no particular reason, had always thought that Orlando was a native of Central Italy, of Umbria or the Marches. Now, looking at him more closely, he saw that he had been deceived by the solid, countrified look of his figure. But his face held no trace of Umbrian mildness or of the placidity of the Marches. It was, indeed, an honest, good-natured face, but the eyes, black and with a tired look in them, had a certain feminine, almost Oriental gravity about them that did not belong to those parts of the country; nor was there mildness and placidity in the smile on the wide, lipless mouth beneath the small, ill-shaped nose. "I should never have thought it." he

admit it, sir, but it is so." Orlando shook his head sorrowfully.

Marcello protested. "Truly I wasn't thinking about that at all. . . I thought you came from Central Italy because of your physical appearance."

But Orlando was not listening. "I'll tell you what it is: it's like water dripping," he went on emphatically, obviously pleased with the unusual expression. "In the street, in the house, everywhere, even on duty . . . colleagues of ours from the North come and find fault even with our spaghetti. . . . My answer to them is, 'In the first place you've now taken to eating spaghetti yourselves—and even more than we do'; and then I say, 'How good your polenta is! . . .'"

Marcello said nothing. In reality he was not all displeased that Orlando should be talking about things that had nothing to do with his mission. It was a way of avoiding familiarity on a terrible subject to which it was quite unsuited. All at once Orlando burst out, "Sicily—what an amount of slander there is about Sicily! . . . The Mafia, for instance . . . You know the kind of thing they say about the Mafia . . . For them, there's not a single Sicilian who's not a member of it . . . Quite apart from the fact that they know absolutely nothing about the Mafia!"

"The Mafia doesn't exist any more," said Marcello.

"Of course not, it doesn't exist any more," said Orlando, with an air of not being altogether convinced. "But, sir, if it did still exist, believe me, it would be far better, infinitely better, than the same sort of affairs in the north—the Teppisti at Milan, the Barabba at Turin . . . They're nothing but a lot of bums, people who live on women, petty thieves and bullies . . . The Mafia was at any rate a school for courage."

"Excuse me, Orlando," said Marcello coldly, "but I must ask you to explain to me exactly how the Mafia came to be a 'school for courage'."

Orlando appeared not so much because of the tone in which Marcello's statement was made as because of the nature of the s

mediate and exhaustive reply. "Well, sir," he said with a sigh, "you ask me a question which it isn't easy to answer . . . In Sicily, courage is the first quality of a man of honor, and the Mafia considers itself an honorable society . . . How can I explain? It's difficult for anyone who hasn't been there and seen things with his own eyes to understand. Imagine, sir, some sort of place—a bar, a café, an inn, a restaurant—in which a group of men met together, men who were armed and hostile to some member of the Mafia. . . . Well, what would he have done? He wouldn't have asked for police protection, he wouldn't have left the neighborhood . . . No: he would have come out of his house, dressed in his best new clothes, freshly shaved, and would have made his appearance at that place, alone and unarmed, and would have spoken only the two or three words that were needed or wanted . . . And then, what do you think? Every single person—the group of his enemies, as well as his friends, and the whole village—all had their eyes on him . . . And he knew that . . . He also knew that it was all up with him if he showed he was afraid, either by not looking people straight in the eye, or by not speaking quite calmly, or by an expression on his face that was not completely serene . . . And so his whole attention was given to facing this examination—with a resolute look in his eye, a quiet voice, measured movements, and a normal color . . . Easier said than done. You have to find yourself in that position to understand how difficult these things are. . . . And that's what I mean, sir—just to give you an example—by the Mafia school for courage."

Orlando, who had become excited while he was speaking, now cast a cool, inquiring glance at Marcello's face, as much as to say, "But it's not about the Mafia that we two should be talking, if I'm not mistaken." Marcello noticed his look and glanced ostentatiously at his wrist watch. "We'd better talk about our own affairs now, Orlando," he said with authority. "I'm meeting Professor Quadri today . . . According to my instructions, I am to point out the professor to you in such a way that you can make quite certain of his identity . . . That's my part, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I shall invite Professor Quadri to dine with me or meet me in a café this evening . . . I can't yet say where . . . But if you telephone me at the hotel about seven o'clock this evening I shall know the place . . . As for Professor Quadri, let's decide now how I'm to point him out to you . . . Let's say, for instance, that Professor Quadri will be the first person whose hand I'll shake when I come into the café or the restaurant. . . . That all right?"

"That's understood, sir."

"And now I must go," said Marcello, again looking at his watch. He put the money for the coffee on the table, picked up his rose and went out, followed at some distance by the Secret Service man.

As they stood on the pavement, Orlando's eyes scrutinized the dense traffic of the street in which two lines of cars were moving, almost at walking pace, in opposite directions, and he said, in an emphatic tone of voice, "No car, no car."

"It's not the first time you've been here, is it, Orlando?" Marcello asked as he searched among the other cars for an empty taxi.

"The first time?" said Orlando, with a sort of heavy reluctance. "Far from it . . . Now just have a guess, Marcello, at how many times I've been here."

"I really don't know."

"Twelve times," said the Secret Service man, "and this is the thirteenth."

A taxi-driver caught Marcello's eye and came and stopped in front of him. "Good-by then, Orlando," said Marcello as he got in. "I shall expect a telephone call from you this evening." Orlando raised his hand to show that he understood. Marcello got into the taxi, giving the address of the hotel.

But, as the taxi bore him along, the sound of those last words spoken by the Secret Service man, his "twelve" and "thirteen"—"twelve times in Paris and this is the thirteenth"—seemed to be prolonged in his ears and to take far-off echoes in his memory. It was as though he had put his head into a cave and shouted, and then found

that his voice came echoing back to him from unsuspected depths. Then, all of a sudden, reminded by those two numbers, he recalled that he had promised to point out Quadri by shaking hands with him and realized why it was that, instead of merely informing Orlando that Quadri was easily recognizable by the hump on his back, he had had recourse to this device. It was his remote, childish memories of the sacred story that had made him forget the professor's deformity, so much more convenient for the purpose of safe identification than a handshake. Twelve was the number of the Apostles, and he himself was the thirteenth, who, with a kiss, betrayed Christ to the soldiers who had come to the garden to arrest Him. The traditional figures of the Stations of the Cross, he had so often contemplated in churches, superimposed themselves now on the modern stage scenery of a French restaurant, with its set tables, its clients sitting at their food, himself rising and going to meet Quadri and taking his hand in his, and Orlando the Secret Service agent sitting apart and watching the pair of them. Then the figure of Judas, the thirteenth Apostle, became confused with his own, coalesced with its outlines, in fact *was* his own.

He was seized with an almost amused desire to speculate, to ponder, in face of this discovery. "Pro . . . did what he did for the same reasons that I . . . for," he said to himself; "and he, too, had . . . though he did not like doing it, because, after . . . necessary that someone should do it . . . frightened? Let's admit frankly that I have . . . part of Judas . . . so what?"

He realized that he was, in fact, not in the . . . ened. Even at the worst, he observed to him . . . tomary cold melancholy coming over him . . . fundamentally nothing unpleasant about it. . . . to think—not in order to justify himself but . . . the comparison and to recognize its . . . was, certainly, like him, but only up to a c . . . Up to the point of the handshake; or even pe . . . like—although he himself was not a disciple . . . up to the betrayal, if understood in a widely g

"Yes, sir."

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"That's understood, sir."

"And now I must go," said Marcello, again looking at his watch. He put the money for the coffee on the table, then rose and went out, followed at some distance by the Secret Service man.

As they stood on the pavement, Orlando's eyes scrutinized the dense traffic of the street in which two lines of cars were moving, almost at walking pace, in opposite directions, and he said, in an emphatic tone of voice, "Paris."

"It's not the first time you've been here, is it, Orlando?" Marcello asked as he searched among the other cars for an empty taxi.

"The first time?" said Orlando, with a sort of heated vehemence. "Far from it . . . Now just have a guess, sir, at how many times I've been here."

"I really don't know."

"Twelve times," said the Secret Service man, "and this is the thirteenth."

A taxi-driver caught Marcello's eye and came and stopped in front of him. "Good-by then, Orlando," said Marcello as he got in. "I shall expect a telephone call from you this evening." Orlando raised his hand to shake that he understood. Marcello got into the taxi, giving the

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He was seized with an almost amused desire to speculate, to ponder, in face of this discovery. "Probably Judas did what he did for the same reasons that I'm doing it for," he said to himself; "and he, too, had to do it, although he did not like doing it, because, after all, it was necessary that someone should do it . . . But why be frightened? Let's admit frankly that I have chosen the part of Judas . . . so what?"

He realized that he was, in fact, not in the least frightened. Even at the worst, he observed to himself, his customary cold melancholy coming over him, there was fundamentally nothing unpleasant about it. He went on to think—not in order to justify himself but to heighten the comparison and to recognize its limits—that Judas was, certainly, like him, but only up to a certain point. Up to the point of the handshake; or even perhaps, if you like—although he himself was not a disciple of Quadri—up to the betrayal, if understood in a widely generic sense.

After that, everything was different. Judas hanged himself, or at any rate thought he could not avoid hanging himself, because the people who had suggested the betrayal and paid him for it did not then have the courage to support and justify him; but *he* would not kill himself nor give himself over to despair, because, behind him . . . he saw the crowds collected in the squares to applaud the man under whose command he served, and, implicitly, to justify him, the man who obeyed orders. His final thought was that he was receiving nothing, in the absolute sense, for what he was doing. No thirty pieces of silver for him. It was just a matter of duty, as Orlando would say. The analogy changed color and faded away, leaving behind nothing but a faint trace of proud, satisfying irony. If anything, he concluded, what mattered was that the comparison should have occurred to him, that he should have worked it out, and for a moment, found it just.

CHAPTER 11

AFTER luncheon, Giulia wanted to get back to the hotel to change her dress before they went to Quadri's. But as they got out of the elevator she put her arm around his waist and whispered, "It's not true that I wanted to change . . . I just wanted to be alone with you for a little." As he walked down the long, deserted corridor between two rows of closed doors, with that affectionate arm around his waist, Marcello could not help saying to himself that, whereas for him this honeymoon in Paris was also, and more particularly, a mission, for Giulia it was purely and simply a honeymoon. It therefore followed, he thought, that no deviation could be permitted to him from the role of bridegroom that he had accepted when he got into the train with her—even if sometimes, as was now the case, he had a feeling far removed from amorous excitement.

normality he had so eagerly longed for—this arm around his waist, these looks, these caresses; and the thing that he was preparing to do in company with Orlando was nothing more than the blood-money paid for such normality. In the meantime they had reached their room. Giulia, without letting go of his waist, opened the door with the other hand and went in with him.

Once inside, she let go of him, turned the key in the lock and said, "Shut the shutter, will you?" Marcello went to the window and did so. As he turned he saw that Giulia, standing by the bed, was already slipping her dress over her head; and he thought he understood what she had meant when she said, "I just wanted to be alone with you for a little." In silence he went and sat down on the edge of the bed, on the opposite side of Giulia. She was now in her underclothes and stockings. With great care she placed her dress on a chair at the head of the bed, took off her shoes, and finally, with an awkward movement, lifting first one leg and then the other, lay down behind him, flat on her back, with one arm folded at the back of her neck. For a moment she was silent, and then she said, "Marcello."

"What is it?"

"Why don't you lie down here beside me?"

Obediently Marcello bent and took off his shoes, and then lay down on the bed beside his wife. Giulia immediately moved close to him, pressing her body against his, and, full of concern, asked anxiously, "What's the matter with you?"

"With me? Nothing . . . Why?"

"I don't know, you seem so worried."

"That's an impression you often have," he answered. "You know that my normal state of mind isn't exactly thoughtless . . . but that doesn't mean that I'm worried."

She embraced him silently. Then she went on, "It wasn't true that I asked you to come here so that I could get ready . . . Nor was it true that I just wanted to be alone with you . . . It's something quite different."

This time Marcello was astonished and felt almost remorseful at having suspected her of a mere erotic crav-

ing. Looking down at her, he saw that the eyes with which she gazed up at him were filled with tears. Affectionate yet not without a touch of irritation, he said to her: "Now it's *my* turn to ask what's the matter with *you*."

"You're quite right," she replied. And immediately she began weeping, with silent sobs whose convulsions he could feel against his own body. Marcello waited a little, in the hope that this incomprehensible weeping would stop. But it appeared, on the other hand, to redouble in intensity. He asked then, staring up at the ceiling, "Won't you tell me what you're crying about?" Giulia went on sobbing for a little and then answered: "For no reason at all . . . Because I'm a fool"; and there was already a faint note of comfort in her woe-bearing voice.

Marcello looked towards her and repeated, "Come . . . tell me what you're crying about."

Giulia turned her eyes to his, and though they were filled with tears the light of hope seemed to be reflected in them; and then she smiled faintly and put out her hand and took the handkerchief from his pocket, wiped her eyes, blew her nose, put the handkerchief in his pocket and then, embracing him again, whispered: "If I tell you why I was crying, you'll think I'm crazy." "Never mind," he said, caressing her, "tell me."

"Well, it was like this," she said. "At lunch time you were so absent-minded—so worried-looking, even that I thought you'd already had enough of me and regretting you had married me . . . I thought perhaps it was because of what I told you in the train—you knew about that lawyer—and that perhaps you'd realized you'd done a stupid thing, you, with the future you had before you, and with your intelligence and your business as well, in marrying an unfortunate girl like me. And so, when I thought this, I also thought I'd take the first step . . . that I'd go away without saying any word to you, so as to save you an embarrassing good-bye. So I decided, as soon as we go back to the hotel, to get up and go . . . to go straight back to Italy and leave you in Paris."

"I can't believe you're being serious," said Marcello, astonished.

"Perfectly serious," she continued, smiling, and flattered by his surprise. "In fact, while we were downstairs in the hall and you went away for a moment to buy some cigarettes, I went to the head porter and asked him to engage me a berth in the Rome sleeping car for tonight . . . You see, I was quite serious."

"But you're crazy," said Marcello, raising his voice in spite of himself.

"I told you," she answered, "that you'd think I was crazy . . . But at that moment I was certain, absolutely certain, that I'd be doing the best thing for you by leaving you and going away . . . Yes, I was as certain as I am certain now," she added, pulling herself up and touching his lips lightly with hers, "that I'm giving you this kiss."

"But why were you so certain?" asked Marcello, perturbed.

"I don't know . . . never mind . . . There are some things one is certain of . . . without any particular reason."

"And then," he could not help exclaiming, as though he felt some remote twinge of regret, "why did you change your mind?"

"Why? Goodness knows! . . . Perhaps it was because you looked at me in the elevator in a certain way—or at any rate I had the impression that you looked at me in a certain way . . . But then I remembered that I'd decided to go away and that I'd engaged a sleeping berth, and so, thinking that now it was too late to turn back, I started to cry . . ."

Marcello said nothing. Guilia interpreted his silence in her own way, and asked him, "You're annoyed, aren't you? . . . You're annoyed about the sleeping berth . . . But they'll cancel it all right . . . One only has to pay twenty per cent."

"Don't be absurd," he answered slowly, as though he were thinking deeply.

"Well then," she said, stifling an incredulous laugh in which, however, there was still a slight tremor of fear, "then you're annoyed because I didn't really go"

"More absurdities," he replied. But this time he felt he was not being entirely sincere. So, as if to suppress any ultimate hesitation, any last regret, he added, "If you had gone away, my whole life would have collapsed." And this time it seemed to him that he had told the truth, even if in an ambiguous manner. Would it not perhaps be a good thing if his life—that life that he had built up from the starting-point of the Lino affair—did really collapse entirely, instead of overloading itself with more burdens and more obligations, like some ridiculous building to which an infatuated owner goes on adding towers and turrets and balconies till finally he endangers its solidity? He felt Giulia's arms enfold him even more closely, in an amorous embrace; and then heard her whisper, "Do you really mean that?"

"Yes," he answered, "I really mean it."

"But what would you have done," she insisted, with a sort of self-satisfied, almost conceited curiosity, "if I had really left you and gone away? . . . Would you have run after me?"

He hesitated before answering, and again he seemed to hear in his own voice an echo of that distant regret. "No, I don't think so . . . Haven't I told you already that my whole life would have collapsed?"

"Would you have stayed in France?"

"Yes, possibly."

"And what about your career? Would you have let that go to pieces?"

"Without you, it wouldn't have had any meaning," he explained calmly. "I do what I'm doing because of you."

"But what *would* you have done, then?" She seemed to be finding some cruel kind of pleasure in imagining him alone, without her.

"I should have done what they all do, the people who leave their own country and their own professions for reasons of this kind. I should have adapted myself to some sort of a job—as a scullion, or a sailor, or a chauffeur . . . or I should have enlisted in the Foreign Legion . . . But why are you so anxious to know?"

"Well . . . it's interesting . . . In the Foreign Legion . . . Under another name?"

"Probably."

"Where is the Foreign Legion stationed?"

"In Morocco, I believe . . . and in other places too."

"In Morocco . . . However, I didn't go away," she murmured, pressing herself against him with greedy, jealous violence. Silence followed these words. Giulia did not move, and Marcello, as he looked at her, saw that she had closed her eyes. She appeared to be asleep. So he, too, closed his eyes, feeling that he would like to sleep. But he could not, although he felt prostrated with a deadly weariness and languor. He was conscious of a deep and painful feeling, as of a rebellion of his whole being; and a strange smile kept recurring in his mind. He was like a wire, simply a human wire through which flowed, ceaselessly, an electric current of terrifying energy whose refusal or acceptance did not depend on him. A wire like those high-tension cables on pylons bearing the notice: Beware: Danger." He was simply one of those conductor-wires, and sometimes the current hummed through his body without troubling him, infusing, in fact, an increased measure of vitality into him. But at other times—as, for instance, now—seeming to be too strong, too intense; and then he longed to be, not a taut, vibrating wire, but one that had been pulled down and left to rust on a pile of rubbish in some factory yard. Why, in any case, should he have to endure this transmission of current, when so many others were not even touched by it? And again, why was there never any interruption of the current, why did it never, for one single moment, cease to flow through him? The smile diverged and branched out into questions that had no answer; and all the time his painful, aching languor increased, clouding his mind, dimming the mirror of his consciousness. At last he dozed off, and it seemed to him that sleep had in some way interrupted the current and that he was really, for once, a piece of broken-off, rusty wire thrown into a corner with other refuse. But at the same moment he felt a hand touch his arm. He jumped up into a sitting position and saw Giulia standing beside the bed, fully dressed and with her hat on. She said in a low voice, "Are you asleep? Couldn't we to be going to Quadri's?"

curiosity—Giulia was stretching her neck in order to observe the other woman, whom, owing to her own half-recumbent position, she could see only imperfectly. At last, without moving, Lina said in a low voice, "You don't mind my staying like this for a little?"

"No, but soon I must get dressed."

After a moment's silence Lina went on, as though resuming an earlier conversation, "How silly you are, though. . . What would it matter to you? . . . Why, you yourself said that if you weren't married you'd have nothing against it."

"Perhaps I said that," Giulia replied almost coquettishly, "so as not to offend you. . . Besides, I *am* married."

Marcello, watching, saw that Lina, while she was speaking, had taken one arm from around Giulia's legs and was moving her hand slowly, tenaciously upward along her thigh, pushing back the edge of the towel as it went. "Married!" she said, with intense sarcasm, and without interrupting her slow approach, "and who to, my God!"

"I like him," said Giulia. Lina's hand, hesitating, insinuating as the head of a snake, now moved from Giulia's hip to her naked groin. But Giulia took hold of it by the wrist and guided it firmly downward again, adding in an indulgent tone, like a governess scolding a restless child, "Don't imagine that I don't see you."

Lina took Giulia's hand and began slowly, thoughtfully kissing it, now and then rubbing her whole face violently against the palm, like a dog. "Little silly!" she breathed, with intense tenderness.

A long silence followed. The concentrated passion that emanated from every one of Lina's movements contrasted in a singular manner with Giulia's vagueness and indifference. The latter no longer appeared to be even curious; and though she abandoned her hand to Lina's kisses and rubbings, she was looking around the room as if searching for some excuse. At last she withdrew her hand and started to get up, saying, "Now I really must get dressed."

Lina leaped nimbly to her feet, exclaiming, "Don't move. . . Just tell me where the things are. . . I'll dress you."

Standing there, with her back to the door, she hid Giu-

lia completely. Marcello heard his wife's voice say, with a laugh, "You want to be my maid too, do you?"

"Why should you mind? . . . It doesn't make any difference to you . . . and it gives me so much pleasure."

"No, I'll dress myself." Out of Lina's fully-dressed appearance, as though by duplication, issued Giulia, completely naked. She passed on tiptoe in front of Marcello's bed and disappeared at the far end of the room. Then he heard her voice saying, "Please don't look at me. Turn the other way. . . You make me feel embarrassed."

"Embarrassed with me? . . . But I'm a woman, too."

"Yes, in a sort of way you're a woman . . . but don't look at me as if you were a man."

"Well, you might as well say frankly that you'd rather I went away."

"No, stay, but don't look at me."

"I'm not looking at you . . . you silly, why do you think I should want to look at you?"

"Don't get angry. . . What I mean is that, if you had spoken to me in that way before, I shouldn't now be embarrassed and you could look at me as much as you like. This was said in a half-stifled voice which seemed to come from inside a dress that she was slipping over her head."

"Don't you want me to help you?"

"Oh my goodness, if you really want to so much."

Determined yet lacking assurance in her movements, hesitating though aggressive, filled with fervor and at the same time humiliated, Lina moved forward, was confined for a moment in front of Marcello, and then disappeared in the direction of that part of the room where Giulia's voice came. There was a moment's silence; then Giulia, in an impatient but not hostile tone, exclaimed, "Ugh, how tiresome you are!" Lina said nothing. The light of the lamp fell on the empty bed, showing up the hollow place left by Giulia's hips in the dark towel. Marcello left the crack in the door and went back into the corridor.

By the time he had taken a few steps he realized that his surprise and agitation had led him, quite unconsciously, to perform a significant act: automatically he had crushed between his fingers the gardenia given him

old man and destined by him for Lina. He dropped the flower on the carpet and made his way to the staircase.

He went down to the ground floor and out into the street, in the deceptive, hazy dimness of twilight. The lamps were already lit—white clusters on distant bridges, yellow lamps in pairs on vehicles, the red rectangles of windows; and night was rising like a somber cloud of smoke to the clear green sky from behind the black outline of roofs and spires on the opposite bank of the river. Marcello went over to the parapet and leaned his elbow on it, looking down at the darkened Seine whirling along in its black flood strings of jewels and circlets of diamonds. The feeling he was now experiencing was nearer to the deathly quiet that follows disaster than to the tumult of disaster itself. He knew that, for a few hours during that afternoon, he had believed in love; now he realized that he was revolving in a topsy-turvy, sterile world in which real love did not occur, but merely sensual relationships, from the most natural and ordinary to the most abnormal and unusual. Certainly the feeling that Lino had had for him had not been love: no more was Lina's feeling for Giulia. Love did not enter into his own relations with his wife; and perhaps even Giulia, indulgent as she was, and tempted, almost, as she had been, by Lina's advances, did not love him with a real love. In this obscure and reeling world, like a stormy twilight, these ambiguous figures of men-women and women-men whose ambiguity, when they met, was mingled and redoubled seemed to hint at some meaning which in itself was also ambiguous, but which was bound up, nevertheless—so it appeared to him—with his own destiny and with impossibility, already proved, of escaping it. Since there was no love, and simply because of that, he would continue to be what he had hitherto been, would carry his mission to completion, would persist in his intention to create a family with Giulia—Giulia the animal, Giulia the unforeseeable. This was normality, this makeshift, this empty form. Outside it, all was confusion and caprice.

He felt himself driven to act in this way owing, also, to the light now thrown on Lina's behavior. She despised him, and probably hated him too, as she had declared sh

did when she was still being sincere; but in order not to sever their relationship and so preclude the possibility of seeing Giulia, to whom she had been attracted, she had contrived to simulate a feeling of love for him. Marcello realized now that from her, henceforward, he could expect neither understanding nor pity; and in face of this final, irremediable hostility, armored, as it was, with sexual abnormality, with political aversion and with moral contempt, he had a feeling of acute and helpless pain. And so that light in her eyes and on her brow, that light, so pure, so intelligent, that had fascinated him, would never be directed on him, to illuminate and soothe him with its affection. Lina would always prefer to humiliate and degrade it in flattery, in entreaty, in hellish embraces. He recalled, at this point, how when he saw her press her face against Giulia's knees, he had been smitten with the same sense of profanation that he had felt in the house at S., when he saw the prostitute Luisa submitting to the embrace of Orlando. Giulia was not Orlando, he thought; but he had desired that that brow should not be humbled before anyone; and he had been disappointed.

As he stood there thinking, night had fallen. Marcello straightened himself up and turned toward the hotel. He was just in time to catch sight of the white figure of Lina coming out of the door and hurrying to a car parked by the pavement. He was struck by her contented and almost furtive air, like that of a weasel or a stoat slinking away from a hen coop with its prey in its mouth. It was not the attitude of one who had been repulsed, he thought: quite the opposite. Perhaps Lina had managed to extract some promise from Giulia; or perhaps Giulia, out of weariness or sensual passivity, had gone so far as to permit some caress or other, valueless to herself, indulgent as she was both to herself and to others, but very precious to Lina. In the meantime Lina had opened the door of the car and had got into it, sitting down sideways and then pulling in her legs. Marcello saw her go past, holding high, in profile, her beautiful, proud, delicate face, her hands on the wheel. The car vanished in the distance and he went back into the hotel.

He went up to their room and entered with

ing. The room was all in order, and Giulia was sitting, fully dressed in front of the dressing table, finishing her hair. Without turning she asked quietly, "Is that you?"

"Yes, it's me," answered Marcello, sitting down on the bed.

He waited a moment and then asked, "Did you enjoy yourself?"

Immediately, vivaciously, his wife turned half around from the table and replied, "Yes, very much indeed. . . We saw such a lot of lovely things and I left my heart behind in at least ten different shops."

Marcello said nothing. Giulia finished doing her hair in silence, then rose and came and sat beside him on the bed. She was wearing a black dress with a wide, ornate *décolletage* that revealed the firm, brown curves of her breasts like two fine fruits in a basket. A scarlet artificial rose was fastened at her shoulder. Her gentle, youthful face with its big smiling eyes and its full mouth wore its usual expression of sensual gaiety. In a smile that was perhaps unconscious Giulia showed, between her brightly painted lips, her regular teeth of brilliant, spotless whiteness. She took his hand affectionately, and said, "Now just imagine what happened to me."

"What?"

"This lady, Professor Quadri's wife. . . Well, just fancy . . . she's not a normal woman."

"What d'you mean?"

"She's one of those women who love other women . . . and in fact, just imagine, she's fallen in love with me . . . just like that . . . at first sight. . . She told me after you'd gone away. . . That's why she insisted so much on my staying and resting at her flat. . . She made me a regular, proper declaration of love. . . Whoever could have thought it?"

"And you—what did you do?"

"I wasn't expecting it at all. . . I was just dropping off to sleep, because I really was tired. . . At first I hardly understood. . . Then at last I did understand, and I really didn't know how to take it. . . You see, it was real, aging passion, just like a man. . . Tell me truthfully,

would you ever have expected that, from a woman like her, so self-controlled, so very self-possessed?"

"No," answered Marcello gently, "I shouldn't have expected it . . . any more than I should expect," he added, "that you would reciprocate such effusions."

"Good heavens, are you by any chance jealous?" she exclaimed, bursting into a delighted, joyous laugh, "jealous of a woman? Even supposing I'd paid any attention to her, you oughtn't to be jealous. . . A woman isn't a man. . . . But you can reassure yourself . . . practically nothing happened between us."

"*Practically* nothing?"

"I said *practically*," she replied in a reticent tone, "because, when I saw she was in such despair, I did allow her to squeeze my hand while she was bringing me to the hotel in her car."

"Only just to squeeze your hand?"

"But you *are* jealous," she exclaimed again, highly delighted. "You really are jealous. . . I've never seen you like that before. . . Well, if you really want to know," she went on after a moment, "I also allowed her to give me a kiss . . . but only like one sister to another. . . Then, as she went on insisting and I got bored, I sent her away. . . That was all. . . Now, tell me, are you still jealous?"

Marcello had prolonged the conversation about Lina mainly in order to furnish himself with yet another proof of the difference between himself and his wife—he whose whole life was upset because of a thing that had never happened, and she who was open to every sort of experience, indulgent, forgetful in the flesh even more quickly than in the spirit. He asked gently, "But you yourself, in the past, have you never had any relationship of that kind?"

"No, never," she answered with decision. This curt tone was so unusual in her that Marcello knew at once that she was lying. "Come on," he insisted; "why lie about it? . . . No one who knew nothing about these things would have behaved as you did with Signora Quadri. . . Tell me the truth."

"But what does it matter to you?"

"It interests me to know."

Giulia sat silent for a moment, with downcast eyes, and then said slowly, "You see, the business with that man, that lawyer. . . . Until the day I met you it had given me a real horror of men. . . . Well, I had a friendship, but it didn't last long . . . with a girl, a student she was, of my own age. . . . She was really fond of me, and it was mainly that affection of hers, at a moment when I needed it badly, that persuaded me. . . . Then she became possessive, exacting and jealous, and so I broke it all off. . . . I still see her occasionally in Rome, in one place or another. . . . Poor dear, she's still very fond of me." Her face, after a moment of reticence and embarrassment, had now resumed its customary placid expression. Taking his hand, she added, "Don't worry, and don't be jealous; you know I don't love anyone except you."

"Yes, I know," said Marcello. He remembered Giulia's tears in the sleeping car, and her attempt at suicide, and knew that she was sincere. From a conventional point of view she had looked on her lost virginity as a betrayal of trust, but she attached no real importance to her past errors.

"But I tell you," Giulia was saying, "that woman really is crazy. . . . D'you know what she wants us to do? She wants us all to go a few days from now to Savoy, where they have a house. . . . In fact, just fancy, she's already worked out a program."

"What program?"

"Her husband leaves tomorrow. She is staying a few days more in Paris. . . . She says it's on business of her own, but I'm convinced it's really for me she's staying. . . . When she proposes we should all leave together and go and spend a week with them in the mountains. . . . The fact that we're on our honeymoon doesn't seem to enter her head. . . . For her, it's just as though *you* didn't exist. . . . She wrote down the address of the house in Savoy for me, and made me swear I would persuade you to accept the invitation. . . ."

"What is the address?"

"There it is," said Giulia, pointing to a piece of paper

on the marble top of the bedside table, "but, good heavens, you don't really want to accept?"

"No, I don't, but perhaps you do?"

"For goodness' sake, d'you really think I take any notice of that woman? . . . I've told you already that I sent her away because she annoyed me with her persistence." Giulia had risen from the bed and, still talking, went out of the room. "By the way," she called from the bathroom, "someone telephoned for you about half an hour ago. . . It was a man's voice, an Italian. . . He wouldn't say who he was . . . but he left a number and said would you ring him as soon as you can. . . I put down the number on that same piece of paper."

Marcello took up the paper, pulled out a notebook from his pocket and carefully wrote down both the address of the Quadris' house in Savoy and Orlando's telephone number. He felt he had now come to himself again after the transient exaltation of the afternoon; and he perceived this, in particular, from the mechanical nature of his actions and from the resigned melancholy that accompanied them. It was all over then, he thought, putting the notebook back in his pocket, and that fleeting appearance of love in his life had been, after all, merely the shock of his life's adjustment into its final, settled form. He thought again for a moment of Lina, and seemed to discern an unmistakable sign of fate in her sudden passion for Giulia, which, while it had allowed him to find out the address of the house in Savoy, had at the same time brought it about that, when Orlando and his men presented themselves there, she would not yet have arrived. Quadri's solitary departure and Lina's remaining in Paris fitted perfectly, in fact, into the plan of his mission. If things had gone differently, it was not clear how he and Orlando could have brought it to a satisfactory conclusion.

He got up, called to his wife that he was going down to wait for her in the hall, and went out. There was a telephone booth at the end of the corridor, and he went to it in a leisurely, almost automatic, manner. It was by the sound of the Secret Service man's voice issuing from the receiver and asking him, in a joking manner,

ere are we going to have this little dinner of ours?" It seemed to bring him out of the cloud of his own thoughts. Quite calmly, speaking slowly but clearly, he proceeded to inform Orlando of Quadri's journey.

CHAPTER 15

THEY got out of the taxi in a narrow street in the Latin quarter, Marcello looked up at the sign over the door. *Le Sq au Vin* was written in white letters on a brown background at the first floor level of an old gray house. They went into the restaurant. A red velvet divan ran all round the room; the tables were in a row in front of the divan; and old rectangular mirrors in gilt frames reflected in the quiet light the central chandelier and the heads of the few customers. Marcello saw Quadri sitting in a corner beside his wife. Dressed in black, and shorter than her by a whole head, he was looking over his spectacles at the menu. Lina, on the other hand, in a black velvet dress that emphasized the whiteness of her arms and breast and the pallor of her face, was sitting erect and motionless and seemed to be anxiously watching the door. She jumped on her feet when she saw Giulia, and behind her, almost hidden by her, the professor also rose. The two women took hands. Marcello raised his eyes and saw, suspended in the unostentatious yellow light of one of the mirrors, an incredible apparition—the head of Orlando, gazing at them. At the same moment the restaurant clock came to life, its metal entrails began to writhe and moan, and finally it struck the hour. "Eight o'clock," he heard Lina exclaim in a contented tone; "How punctual you are!" Marcello shuddered, and, as the clock continued to strike its mournful, solemn-sounding notes, stretched out his hand to shake the hand that Quadri offered him. The clock struck its last note with energy, and then, as he pressed Quadri's palm against his own, he remembered that, according to agreement, it was this handshake that

was to point out the victim to Orlando, and suddenly was almost tempted to stoop and kiss Quadri on his left cheek, just as Judas had done, to whom he had jestingly compared himself that afternoon. He actually seemed to feel the rough contact of that cheek beneath his lips, and wondered at so strong a power of suggestion. Then he looked up again at the mirror; Orlando's head was still there, hanging in the void, staring at them. At last they sat down, Quadri and himself on chairs and the two women opposite them, on the divan.

The wine waiter arrived with his list, and Quadri began ordering the wines with extreme care. He seemed completely absorbed in this occupation and had a long discussion with the waiter about the quality of his wines, that he appeared to know very well. Finally he ordered a dry white wine to go with the fish, a red wine with the roast, and some champagne on ice. The wine waiter was succeeded by the other waiter, with whom the same scene was repeated: knowing discussions about various dishes, hesitations, reflections, questions, answers, and finally the ordering of three dishes, *hors d'oeuvres*, fish and meat. In the meantime Lina and Giulia conversed in low tones, and Marcello, his eyes fixed on Lina, had fallen into a kind of dream. He still seemed to hear the frantic striking of the clock behind him while he was shaking hands with Quadri; he seemed to see again the decapitated head of Orlando looking at him out of the mirror; and he knew that never, as at that moment, had he been so clearly confronted with his destiny. He was like a stone standing in the middle of a crossroad, with two roads, different but of equally decisive importance, leading away from him, one on each side. He started when he heard Quadri asking him, in his usual indifferent tone, "Been going around Paris?"

"Yes, a little."

"Like it?"

"Very much."

"Yes, it's a likeable place," said Quadri, as though speaking on his own account and almost making a concession to Marcello, "but I wish you'd give your attention to that point that I've already alluded to to-

sn't the vicious city, filled with corruption, that the newspapers in Italy talk about. . . I'm certain you have that idea, and it's an idea which doesn't correspond to reality."

"No, I haven't that idea," said Marcello, a little surprised.

"I'm astonished that you haven't," said the professor without looking at him, "all the young men of your generation have ideas of that kind. . . They think you can't be strong without being austere, and in order to feel austere they invent fantastic theories of an impossible kind."

"I don't think I'm particularly austere," said Marcello.

"I'm sure you are, and I'll prove it to you," said the professor. He waited till the waiter had put down the dishes of *hors d'oeuvres* and then went on. "Now. . . I bet that while I was ordering the wines you were secretly wondering that I could appreciate such things. . . Isn't that so?"

How had he guessed that? Marcello unwillingly admitted, "You may be right . . . but there's no harm in it. . . The reason why I thought so was that you yourself have what you call an austere look."

"But not like yours, my dear boy, not like yours," repeated the professor pleasantly. "But let me go on. . . Now tell me the truth—you don't like wine and you don't understand it."

"No, to tell the truth I hardly ever drink," said Marcello; "but what does that matter?"

"It matters a great deal," said Quadri quietly. "A very great deal. . . And I'm also willing to bet that you don't appreciate good food."

"I eat—" began Marcello.

"You eat in order to eat," finished the professor with an accent of triumph, "which is just what I meant. . . And finally I'm sure you have a prejudice against love-making. . . If, for instance, you see a couple kissing each other in a public park, your first impulse is one of condemnation and disgust, and in all probability you will infer that the city in which the park is situated is a shameless city. . . Isn't that so?"

Marcello understood now what Quadri was getting at.

He said, with an effort, "I don't infer anything. . . It's simply that I was probably not born with a taste for these things."

"It's not only that, but for you, those that do have such tastes are blameworthy and therefore to be despised. . . Admit that's what you feel."

"No, it's not that; they're different from me, that's all."

"He that is not with us is against us," said the professor, making a sudden sortie into politics. "That's one of the slogans that they love repeating, in Italy and in other places too, nowadays, isn't it?" He had meanwhile started eating, and with such gusto that his spectacles had got pushed out of place.

"It doesn't seem to me," said Marcello drily, "that politics have anything to do with these matters."

"Edmondo," said Lina.

"Yes, my dear?"

"You promised me we wouldn't talk about politics."

"But we're *not* talking about politics," said Quadri, "we're talking about Paris. . . In short," he concluded, "since Paris is a city where people love to eat and drink, to dance and kiss in the parks, in fact to amuse themselves—I'm sure your opinion of Paris can only be unfavorable."

This time Marcello said nothing. Giulia, with a smile, answered for him: "Anyhow *I* like the people of Paris very much indeed. . . They're so gay."

"Well said, Signora," the professor approved; "you must try and cure your husband."

"But he's not ill."

"Yes, he is; he's ill with austerity," said the professor, his head bent over his plate. And he added, almost between his teeth, "Or rather, austerity is just a symptom."

It now seemed obvious to Marcello that the professor—who, according to what Lina had told him, knew all about him—was amusing himself by playing with him like a cat with a mouse. He could not help thinking that it was a very innocent game compared with his own somber one, which had been started that afternoon at the Quadris' flat and which was destined to finish bloodily at the villa in Savoy. With a sort of melancholy coquettishness he asked Lina, "Do I really seem so austere . . . to y"

He saw her studying him with a cold, reluctant eye, in which he discerned, to his distress, the profound aversion which she cherished for him. Then, evidently, Lina decided to resume the role of amorous woman that she had taken it upon herself to play, for she replied, with a forced smile, "I don't know you well enough. . . You certainly give one the impression of being very serious."

"Ah, that's certainly true," said Giulia, looking affectionately at her husband. "I suppose I've seen him smile perhaps a dozen times. . . Serious is the word."

Lina was gazing fixedly at him now, with malicious intentness. "No," she said slowly, "no, I was wrong. . . Serious is *not* the word. . . Worried would be more correct."

"Worried about what?"

Marcello saw her shrug her shoulders, indifferently. "That, of course, I don't know." But, at the same moment, to his great surprise, he felt her foot, under the table, slowly and deliberately first touching his own lightly and then pressing it.

Then Quadri said in a kindly manner, "Clerici, don't worry too much about looking worried. . . It's nothing but talk, just to pass the time. . . You're on your honeymoon—that's the only thing that ought to worry you. . . Isn't that true, Signora?" He smiled at Giulia, with that smile of his which looked like a grimace caused by some mutilation; and Giulia smiled back at him, saying gaily, "Perhaps it's just that that's worrying him—isn't that so, Marcello?"

Lina still continued to press his foot with hers, and he experienced at this contact a sense of duplication—as though the ambiguity of his love-relationships had now been transferred to his whole life and there were two situations instead of only one: the first, in which he pointed out Quadri to Orlando and went back to Italy with Giulia, the second in which he saved Quadri, deserted Giulia, and stayed in Paris with Lina. The two situations, like two superimposed photographs, cut across each other and were confused by the varying colors of his feelings of regret and horror, of hope and of melancholy, of resignation and of revolt. He knew perfectly well that Lina was pressing his feet merely in order to deceive him and to

perform faithfully her role of the woman in love; and yet, absurd though it was, he almost hoped that this was not true and that she did seriously love him. He was wondering all the time why in the world she had chosen, out of so many possible ones, this particular method—so traditional and so common—of expressing sentimental understanding, and he seemed to find in that choice another sign of her settled contempt for him, as a person who did not require very much subtlety or inventiveness to deceive him. Meanwhile Lina, still pressing his foot and gazing at him with intention, was saying, "About this honeymoon of yours. . . I've already spoken to Giulia, but as I know Giulia won't have the courage to speak to you about it, I'm going to make the suggestion myself. . . Why don't you come and spend the last part of it in Savoy? . . . With us? . . . We shall be there the whole summer. . . We've got a lovely spare room. . . You could stay a week or ten days or as long as you like . . . and go straight back to Italy from there."

So, Marcello said to himself, almost disappointed, so that was the cause of the foot-pressing. It occurred to him again, this time with a touch of spite, how extremely well the invitation to Savoy fitted in with Orlando's plan: if they accepted the invitation, they would keep Lina in Paris and in the meantime Orlando would have plenty of time to deal with Quadri down there in the mountains. He said slowly, "Personally I've nothing against a jaunt to Savoy . . . but not for a week or so . . . not before we've seen Paris."

"But that's perfect," cried Lina at once, triumphantly; "you can come down there with me. . . My husband's going on tomorrow. . . I've got to stay another week in Paris too."

Marcello observed that her foot was no longer pressing against his. As the need that had inspired it ceased, so the flattery ceased also; and Lina had not even thought to thank him by a glance. From Lina his eyes moved to his wife, and he saw that she was looking displeased. Then she said, "I'm sorry I can't agree with my husband . . . and I'm sorry also if I seem rude to you, Signora Quadri . . . but it's impossible for us to go to S — — —"

Paris. . ."

"After Paris, as you know, we've got to go to the Côte d'Azur to join those friends of ours." This was a lie, for they had no friends on the Côte d'Azur. Marcello saw that Giulia was lying in order to get rid of Lina and at the same time to demonstrate to him her indifference to the other woman. But there was a danger that Lina, disgusted at Giulia's refusal, might leave with Quadri. It was necessary, therefore, to guard against this and to make his recalcitrant wife accept the invitation without more ado. He said hastily, "Oh, those people—we can give that up if necessary. . . We can see them at any time."

"The Côte d'Azur!—but how awful," exclaimed Lina, pleased at Marcello's siding with her. And she went on, in a gay, impetuous, singsong voice, "Whoever goes to the Côte d'Azur! . . . South American adventurers, *cocottes*. . ."

"Yes, but we promised to go," said Giulia obstinately.

Again Marcello felt Lina's foot pressing his own. With an effort, he said, "Come on, Giulia, why shouldn't we accept?"

"Well, if you really want to. . . ." she replied, bending her head.

He saw Lina, at these words, turn toward Giulia with a disturbed, sad, irritated, surprised look on her face. "But why?" she cried, with a kind of wondering consternation in her voice, "what is it? . . . Just that you want to see that horrible Côte d'Azur? . . . That's simply being provincial. . . Nobody but provincials wants to visit the Côte d'Azur. . . I assure you no one in your place would hesitate for a moment. . . Why!" she went on suddenly, with desperate vivacity, "there must be some reason that you're not telling us. . . Perhaps you've taken a dislike to my husband and me?"

Marcello could not but admire the violence of passion that permitted Lina to make what was, in effect, a lover's scene with Giulia in his own and Quadri's presence. Giulia, somewhat surprised, protested, "Please . . . really. . . What are you saying?"

Quadri, who was silently eating and appeared to be en-

joying his food rather than listening to the conversation, observed with his usual indifference, "Lina, you're embarrassing the lady. . . Even if she has taken a dislike to us, as you say, she'll never tell us so."

"Yes, you've taken a dislike to us," Lina went on, taking no notice of her husband, "or rather, perhaps it's *me* you've taken a dislike to. . . Is that so, my dear? . . . You've taken a dislike to me. . . One imagines," she went on, turning to Marcello and still speaking with that same desperate social vivacity which hinted at things it did not say, "One imagines that somebody likes one, and sometimes, instead, it's just the people one wants to be liked by who simply can't bear one. . . Now be truthful, my dear, and admit that you can't bear me. . . And while I'm talking like this and stupidly insisting that you should come and stay with us in Savoy, you're thing, 'What does this crazy woman want of me? How is it she doesn't realize that I can't endure her face, her voice, or her manners—her whole personality, in fact?' . . . Be truthful, admit that's just the kind of thing you're thinking at this very moment."

Now, thought Marcello, she had abandoned all prudence; and if it was perhaps possible for the husband to attribute no importance to these heart-wrung insinuations, he himself—for whose benefit, according to the pretence, all this insistence was being displayed—could hardly fail to realize for whom they were really intended. Giulia, mildly astonished, protested, "But what *are* you thinking about . . . I should really like to know why you think these things."

"So it's true," exclaimed the afflicted woman, "you *have* taken a dislike to me." Then, turning to her husband, she said, with febrile, bitter complacency, "You see, Edmondo, you said she wouldn't tell me. . . But now she *has* told me: she *has* taken a dislike to me."

"I didn't say that," said Giulia smiling; "I never even dreamed of such a thing. . ."

"You didn't say it but you *made* it quite clear."

Quadri, without raising his eyes from his plate, said, "Lina, I don't understand why you go on arguing like this. . . Why should Signora Clerici have taken a dislike

to you? She's only known you for a few hours, and probably she hasn't any particular feeling about you."

Marcello saw that he would have to intervene again; Lina's eyes, angry and almost insulting in their look of scorn and imperiousness, demanded it of him. She was no longer pressing his foot now, but, with crazy imprudence at a moment when he happened to place his hand on the table, she pretended to be taking some salt and gave his fingers a squeeze. He said, in a conciliating but decisive manner, "Giulia and I, on the contrary, both like you very much indeed . . . and we accept your invitation with pleasure. . . We'll certainly come—won't we, Giulia?"

"Yes, of course," said Giulia, suddenly surrendering "it was only because of that engagement of ours. . . We really wanted to accept."

"Splendid . . . Then that's understood . . . We'll leave together in a week's time." Lina was radiant, and at once started to talk of the walks they would take in Savoy of the beauty of that part of the country, of the house in which they would be staying. Marcello noticed, however that she talked in a confused way, more in obedience, as it were, to an urge to sing—like a bird suddenly gladdened by a ray of sunshine inside its cage—than to the necessity of saying anything particular or giving any particular information. And, just as a bird gains vigor from its own singing, so did she appear to become intoxicated with the sound of her own voice, that trembled with the exultation of an imprudent, uncontrolled delight. Feeling himself excluded from the conversation between the two women Marcello almost mechanically looked up at the mirror hanging at Quadri's back: the honest, good-natured face of Orlando was still there, suspended in the void, decapitated but alive. But it was no longer alone: beside it, in profile, no less precise and no less absurd, another head could now be seen, talking to the head of Orlando. It was the head of a bird of prey, but with nothing of the eagle about it; of a bird of prey of a poor, inferior species—with small, dull, deep-set eyes beneath a low forehead; a large, melancholy, beaky nose; hollow cheeks with the shadow of asceticism upon them; a small mouth; a shriveled chin. Marcello allowed his eyes to rest for some time upon this

face, wondering if he had seen it before; and he started when Quadri's voice asked him, "By the way, Clerici . . . If I asked a favor of you . . . would you grant it me?"

It was an unexpected question; and Marcello noticed that Quadri had waited to ask it until his wife had at last stopped talking. "Certainly," he said, "if it's in my power."

It seemed to him that Quadri looked at his wife before he spoke, as if to have her corroboration of an agreement already discussed and arranged. "It's about the following matter," Quadri then said, in a tone of voice both gentle and cynical, "You are certainly not ignorant of my activities here in Paris and of the reason why I have never gone back to Italy . . . Now we have friends in Italy with whom we correspond as best we can . . . One of the methods we use is to entrust letters to people who have no concern with politics, or who anyhow are not suspected of carrying on any political activities . . . I thought perhaps you would take one of these letters to Italy for me . . . and post it at the first station you happen to come to—Turin, for instance."

There was a silence. Marcello now realized that Quadri's request had no other purpose than to put him to the test, or, at the least, to embarrass him; and he also saw that it was made by agreement with Lina. Probably Quadri, faithful to his system of persuasion, had convinced his wife of the expedience of this plan—though not to such an extent as to modify her hostility towards Marcello. The latter thought he could guess this from the cold, drawn, almost irritated look on her face. But he could not, for the moment, perceive what other purpose Quadri could have in view. To gain time, he answered: "But if they find out, I shall end up in prison."

Quadri smiled and said, jokingly, "That wouldn't do any great harm . . . On the contrary, for us it would be quite a good thing . . . Don't you know that political movements require martyrs and victims?"

Lina frowned but said nothing. Giulia looked at Marcello anxiously. It was obvious that she wanted her husband to refuse. Marcello resumed, slowly, "In fact, you really almost want the letter to be discovered."

"No; not that," said the professor, pouring himself some wine in a playful, careless manner which, for some reason, almost made Marcello sorry for him. "What we want is that the greatest possible number of people should compromise themselves and fight on our side . . . Going to prison for our cause is only one of a very large number of ways of compromising oneself and joining in the struggle—certainly not the only one." He drank slowly; then went on, seriously and in an unexpected manner. "But I only asked you, so to speak, as a matter of form . . . I know you'll refuse."

"You guessed right," said Marcello, who had been weighing the pros and cons of the proposal. "I'm sorry, but I don't think I can do you this service."

"My husband isn't concerned with politics," explained Giulia with nervous solicitude, "he's a government official . . . he's outside all that."

"Yes, of course," said Quadri, with an air of indulgence, almost of affection; "of course; he's a government official."

It seemed to Marcello that Quadri was curiously satisfied at his reply. His wife, on the other hand, looked angry. She asked Giulia, in an aggressive tone: "Why are you so afraid of your husband being concerned with politics?"

"What's the use of it?" answered Giulia, with perfect naturalness; "He's got to think of his own future, not of politics."

"That's how the women in Italy argue," said Lina, turning to her husband, "and then you're surprised that things go as they do."

Giulia was annoyed. "Really, Italy has nothing to do with it . . . In certain circumstances the women of any country would argue in the same way . . . If you lived in Italy, you'd think as I do."

"Now, now, don't get angry," said Lina, with a gloomy but affectionate laugh, passing her hand, in a rapid caress, around Giulia's sulky face. "I was joking. . . You may be right . . . Anyhow you're so charming when you defend your husband and get angry on his behalf. . . Isn't it true, Edmondo, that she's charming?"

Quadri made a vague, slightly disgusted, sign of agreement, as much as to say, "women's talk," and then went seriously, "You're right, Signora . . . A man should never be placed in the position of having to choose between truth and bread."

On the subject, it seemed to Marcello, was exhausted. Nevertheless he was still curious to know the real reason for the proposal. The waiter changed the plates and put a dish of fruit on the table. Then the wine waiter came and asked whether he should open the bottle of champagne. "Yes, certainly, open it," said Quadri.

The waiter took the bottle out of the ice pail, wrapped the neck in a napkin, pushed the cork upwards and then, lightly, poured the foaming wine into the champagne glasses. Quadri rose to his feet, glass in hand. "Let us drink to the Cause," he said; and turning to Marcello, "You didn't want to take the letter, but at least you won't mind drinking a toast will you?" He seemed moved, and his eyes were bright with tears; and yet Marcello noticed a certain look of cunning, even of calculation, both in the way he proposed the toast and in the expression of his face. Marcello looked at his wife, and at Lina, before he answered. Giulia, who had risen to her feet, gave him a meaning glance, as much as to say, "You can surely drink a toast." Lina was holding her glass in her hand and her

in a severed head. Quadri held out his glass to the waiter, who filled it again; then, endowing the gesture with a characteristic, sentimental emphasis, he turned towards Marcello, raising his glass, and said, "And now to your own personal health, Clerici . . . and thank you." He stressed the word "thank you" in a meaning manner, emptied his glass at one gulp and sat down.

For some minutes they drank in silence. Giulia had twice emptied her glass, and was now looking at her husband with a tender, grateful, tipsy expression. Suddenly she exclaimed: "How good champagne is! . . . I say, Marcello, don't you think champagne's good stuff?"

"Yes, it's a very good wine," he admitted.

"You don't appreciate it enough," said Giulia. "It's absolutely delicious . . . I'm tight already." She laughed and shook her head and then suddenly went on, raising her glass, "Come on, Marcello, let's drink to our love."

Tipsy, laughing, she held out her glass. The professor looked on from a distance; Lina, with a cold, disgusted expression on her face, made no attempt to hide her disapproval. Suddenly Giulia changed her mind. "No," she cried, "you're too austere, it's quite true . . . You're ashamed to drink to our love . . . so I shall drink, all by myself, to life—to life that I love and that's so beautiful . . . to life!" She drank with a joyful, awkward haste that caused part of the wine to be upset on the table; then she cried, "That brings luck!" and, wetting her fingers in the wine, made as if to touch Marcello on the temples. He could not help making a movement as though to defend himself. Then Giulia jumped up, exclaiming, "You *are* ashamed . . . well, I'm not"; and she went round the table and embraced Marcello, almost falling on top of him and kissing him hard on the mouth. "We're on our honeymoon," she said in a challenging tone as she went back to her place, breathless and laughing; "we're on our honeymoon and we're not here to engage in politics or carry back letters to Italy."

Quadri, to whom these words appeared to be addressed, said calmly, "You're quite right, Signora." Marcello, between Quadri's conscious allusions and his wife's uncon-

scious, innocent ones, preferred to remain silent and with downcast eyes. Lina allowed a moment's pause elapse and then asked, in a casual sort of way, "What are you doing tomorrow?"

"We're going to Versailles," replied Marcello, wiping Giulia's lipstick from his mouth with his handkerchief.

"I'll come too," said Lina eagerly. "Let's go in the morning and have lunch there . . . I'll help my husband pack and then I'll come and fetch you."

"All right," said Marcello.

Lina went on, conscientiously, "I should like to be driven you there . . . but my husband's taking the car so we shall have to go by train . . . It's gay, isn't it?"

Quadri did not appear to have heard. He was paying the bill, and was extracting—and emphasizing his delicacy as he did so—banknotes folded in four from the pocket of his striped trousers. Marcello was on the point of handing him some money but Quadri refused it, saying, "Some other time . . . in Italy."

All of a sudden Giulia burst out, in a very loud voice: "In Savoy we'll be together . . . but I want to go to Versailles alone with my husband."

"Thank you," said Lina ironically, rising from the table; "that's what's called plain speaking, isn't it?"

"Please don't be offended," began Marcello, embarrassed, "it's the champagne . . ."

"No it's not, it's my love for you, you stupid!" said Giulia. Laughing, she went off with the professor toward the door. Marcello heard her continue, "Does it seem wrong to you that I should want to be alone with my husband during our honeymoon?"

"No, my dear," replied Quadri gently, "it's perfectly right."

Lina, meanwhile, was commenting in an acid tone, "How silly of me, I hadn't thought of it . . . Of course the expedition to Versailles is part of the ritual for young married couples."

At the door, Marcello insisted on Quadri's going out in front of him. As he was going out, he again heard the clock strike the hour; it was ten o'clock.

THE professor took his seat at the wheel of the car, leaving the door open. "Your husband can go in front with mine," Lina said to Giulia, "and you come in the back with me."

But Giulia answered, in a teasing, tipsy way, "Why should I? Personally, I'd rather go in front," and she jumped in resolutely beside Quadri. So Marcello and Lina found themselves side by side on the back seat.

Marcello now felt a desire to take Lina at her word and behave as if he really believed that she loved him. In this desire there was more than a mere vindictive impulse; there was also a remnant of hope, as though in a contradictory and involuntary way he still had illusions about Lina's feelings. The car moved off, then slowed down at a dark spot in order to turn into a side street; and Marcello, taking advantage of the darkness, seized Lina's hand that was lying on her knee and pulled it down on to the seat between them. He saw her turn at his touch with an angry jerk, but this was quickly transformed into a false gesture of complicity and of urgent warning. The car went on, threading the narrow streets of the Latin Quarter, and all the time Marcello was squeezing Lina's hand. He could feel it lying tense within his own, rejecting his caress not merely with its muscles but even, so to speak, with its skin, while the fingers wriggled impotently in what seemed to be a mixture of repugnance, indignation and rage. At a corner the car heeled over and they fell against each other. Then Marcello seized Lina by the back of the neck, just as one takes hold of a cat that might turn and scratch, and, twisting her head to one side, kissed her on the mouth. She tried to disengage herself, but Marcello took a tighter hold on the thin, shaven, boyish neck, and then Lina, with a subdued groan, gave up all resistance and submitted to the kiss. Her lips, Marcello noticed, were twisted into a grimace of disgust; and

at the same time the sharp nails of the hand that he still held in his were pressed into his palm, in a gesture that might have been thought to be voluptuous but that Marcello knew was, in reality, charged with horror and loathing. He prolonged the kiss as much as he possibly could, looking now at her eyes, that were sparkling with hatred and impatient repugnance, now, at the black motionless heads of Giulia and Quadri in front. The headlights of an approaching car lit up the windshield brilliantly: Marcello let go of Lina and threw himself back in his seat.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw her fall back in her seat and then slowly raise her handkerchief to her mouth and wipe it in a thoughtful, disgusted manner. And then, noticing with what care and what distaste she cleaned those lips which, according to the pretence, should have still been palpitating and greedy for more kisses, there swept over him an obscure feeling of desperate, heart-rending pain.

"Love me!" he wanted to cry out, "love me . . . for God's sake, love me!" It suddenly seemed to him that not only his own life, but Lina's too, now depended upon her love for him—so longed-for, so impossible. Now, as though infected by Lina's steadfast loathing, he realized that he too was filled with a hatred which, though mixed with love and inseparable from it, was yet bloody and murderous. At that moment he felt he would willingly have killed her; for it seemed unbearable to him to know that she was alive and an enemy; and he felt also—though he was frightened at feeling it—that to see her die would now, possibly, give him greater pleasure than to be loved by her. Then a sudden, generous impulse of the spirit made him sorry, and he said to himself, "Thank Heaven, she won't be in Savoy when Orlando and the others get there . . . thank Heaven." And he saw that he had just wished for a moment to have her killed just as he intended in the same way and at the same time.

The car stopped and they got out. Marcello had a glimpse of a dark suburban street with an uneven row of small houses on one side and a garden wall on the other. "You'll see," said Lina, looking outside the door, "it's not exactly a place for ~~just this~~ a ~~moment~~ ~~there~~

... but it's interesting." They went to an illuminated loorway, above which a small rectangle of red glass bore, in blue letters, the words: *La Cravate Noire*. "The Black Tie," explained Lina to Giulia; "it means the black tie that men wear with dinner jackets and that all the women here wear, from the waitresses to the proprietress." They went into the vestibule and immediately a face with hard features and short hair, but beardless and of feminine complexion and character, appeared above the cloakroom counter, saying in a thin voice: "*Vestiare*." Giulia, amused, went up to the counter and turned around, letting her cloak fall from her bare shoulders into the hands of this attendant in a black jacket, starched shirt and bow tie. Then, in an atmosphere thick with smoke and a deafening hum of music and voices, they passed through to the dance floor.

A handsome woman, of uncertain age but no longer young, her plump, pale, smooth face rounded off under the chin by the usual black bow tie, came forward between the crowded tables to meet them. She greeted Quadri's wife with affectionate familiarity, and then, raising to her commanding eye a monocle that was fastened by a silk cord to the lapel of her masculine jacket, said, "Four people . . . I've just the right thing for you, Madame Quadri . . . Please come this way . . ." Lina, who appeared to have been put in a good humor by the place they were in, leaned over the shoulder of the woman with the eyeglass and made some gay, malicious remark, to which she responded, in a manly fashion, with a shrug of the shoulders and a scornful grimace. Following her, they reached an empty table at the far end of the room. "*Voilà!*" said the proprietress. Now she, in her turn, bent down over Lina who had taken her seat, murmured something into her ear with a jocular, impudent, look, and then, very upright, her small, glossy head held commandingly erect, went off among the tables.

A small, sturdy, very dark-complexioned waitress, dressed in the same fashion, came to their table, and Lina, with the gay, self-possessed sureness of someone who at last finds herself in a place that suits her tastes, ordered the drinks. Then she turned towards Giulia and said

cheerfully, "You see how they're dressed? . . . Just like a convent, isn't it? . . . Don't you think it's odd?"

Giulia, it seemed to Marcello, was now looking embarrassed; and she smiled in an entirely conventional manner. In a small round space among the tables, under a kind of inverted cement mushroom that vibrated with the unreal light of neon lamps, was a throng of dancing couples, some of them women dancing together. The orchestra—also composed of women dressed as men—was banished under the stairs that led to the gallery. The professor said, in rather a vague way, "I don't care for this place . . . These women seem to me to be more worthy of pity than of curiosity." Lina did not appear to have heard her husband's remark. She never stopped gazing at Giulia, with eyes that were filled with a devouring, infatuated, yearning light. At last, as if yielding to an irresistible longing, she suggested, with a nervous laugh: "Shall we dance together? They'll take us for two of themselves . . . it'll be amusing . . . Let's pretend to be like them . . . Come along, do . . ."

Laughing excitedly, she had already risen to her feet and, with one hand on Giulia's shoulder, was urging her to do the same. Giulia, irresolute, looked first at her and then at her husband. Marcello said drily, "What are you looking at me for? . . . There's no harm in it." He saw that, now again, he had to support Lina. Giulia sighed and rose slowly and unwillingly to her feet. The other woman, in the meantime, seemed to lose her head altogether, and kept repeating, "If even your husband says there's no harm in it . . . Come along, do, come along . . ." As Giulia went off, she said, "To tell the truth, I'm not particularly anxious to be taken for one of them." But she walked off in front of Lina and, when she reached the space reserved for dancing, turned back toward her with arms outstretched so that Lina could take hold of her. Marcello watched Lina go close to her, put her arm around Giulia's waist with manly assurance and authority, and then, falling into a dance step, guide her on to the dance floor among the other couples. For a moment he gazed, in vague but painful astonishment at the two women dancing in each other's arms. Giulia was smiling.

than Lina, they were dancing cheek to cheek, and, at each step, Lina's arm seemed to enfold Giulia's waist more closely. To him it appeared a sad and unbelievable sight: there, he could not help thinking, was the love which, had the world been different, had life been different, would have been his, would have saved him, would have brought him joy. But he was aware of a hand on his arm. He turned and saw Quadri's red, shapeless face bending towards him. "Clerici," said Quadri in a voice full of emotion, "don't imagine that I haven't understood you."

Marcello looked at him and said slowly: "Excuse me, but now it's I who fail to understand you."

"Clerici," answered the other man quickly, "you know who *I* am . . . but I also know who *you* are." He was looking at him intently, and had now taken hold, with both hands of the lapels of Marcello's jacket. The latter, agitated, frozen with a sort of terror, stared back into his face: no, there was no hatred in Quadri's eyes, there was, rather, a look of sentimental, tearful, melting emotion which at the same time had something slightly calculating and malicious about it. Then Quadri went on, "I know who you are, and I realize that, by speaking in this way, I may give you the impression that I am under an illusion, that I am being naïve, or even downright stupid . . . Never mind . . . Clerici, I want, in spite of everything, to be sincere with you, and I say to you: thank you."

Marcello looked at him but said nothing. Quadri's hands were still on the lapels of his coat and he felt it being pulled tightly down on his neck as though someone had seized hold of him with the object of thrusting him violently away. "I say to you: thank you," continued Quadri, "for having refused to take that letter to Italy . . . If you had done your duty, you would have taken the letter and handed it on to your superiors . . . so as to get it deciphered and have the people it was addressed to arrested . . . You didn't do it, Clerici, you refused to do it . . . from loyalty, from a sudden recognition of error or a sudden doubt, from honesty . . . I don't know . . . I only know that you didn't do it and I repeat again: thank you."

Marcello was on the point of replying, but Quadri, at last letting go of his jacket, put his hand in front of his mouth. "No," he said, "don't tell me you refused to take charge of the letter in order not to arouse my suspicions; in order to act up to your own obligations as a bridegroom on his honeymoon . . . Don't tell me that because I know it isn't true . . . What you've really done is to take the first step towards your own redemption . . . and I thank you for having given me the opportunity of helping you to take it . . . Go on, Clerici . . . and you may be truly reborn to a new life." Quadri fell back in his seat and made a pretence of wishing to quench his thirst, taking a long draught from his glass. "But here are the ladies," he said, rising to his feet. Marcello, bewildered, followed his example.

He noticed that Lina appeared to be in a bad temper. When she had sat down, she opened her compact in an angry, hurried sort of way, and with a series of furious dabs hastily powdered her nose and cheeks. Giulia, on the other hand, was quite placid and indifferent. She sat down beside her husband and took his hand affectionately, under the table, as if to assert clearly her feeling of repugnance for Lina. The proprietress with the eyeglass came up to them and crinkling her smooth, pale cheek into a honeyed smile, asked in an affected voice whether everything was all right.

Lina answered tartly that things couldn't be better. The proprietress bent down towards Giulia and said to her, "It's the first time you've been here . . . May I offer you a flower?"

"Thank you," said Giulia, surprised.

"Christina," called the proprietress. Another girl in a dinner jacket came up—very different from the resplendent flower girls usually to be found at night clubs. She was pale and thin, with no make-up, and had an Oriental-looking face with a big nose, thick lips, and a bare, bony forehead beneath hair cut extremely short and unevenly, so that it looked as if it had fallen out as the result of an illness. She held out a basket of gardenias, and the proprietress, having selected one, pinned it on Giulia's

bosom, with the words, "An offering from the management."

"Thank you," repeated Giulia.

"Not at all," said the proprietress. "Now, I'll bet Madame is Spanish . . . isn't that so?"

"Italian," said Lina.

"Ah, Italian . . . I ought to have known it . . . with those black eyes . . ." The words were lost in the noise of the crowd, as the proprietress and the thin, melancholy Christina went off together.

The band had now started to play again. Lina turned towards Marcello and said to him, almost angrily, "Why don't you ask me to dance? I should like to." Without a word he rose and followed her to the dance floor.

They began dancing. Lina held herself well away from Marcello, who could not help remembering sadly the possessive affection with which, a short time before, she had clung to Giulia. They danced in silence for a little, and then, all of a sudden, with a violence in which the fiction of their amorous collusion was curiously tinged with anger and aversion, Lina said to him, "Instead of kissing me in the car, with the risk of my husband noticing it, you might have made your wife give in about the expedition to Versailles."

Marcello was astonished at the naturalness with which she grafted her real anger on to the unreal love-relationship; and also at the cynical, brutal, familiar way in which she addressed him, which seemed typical of a woman who has no scruple in betraying her husband. For a moment he said nothing. Lina, interpreting this silence in her own way, persisted, "Why don't you say something? . . . Is this your love? You're not even capable of making that silly wife of yours obey you."

"My wife isn't silly," he replied gently, more puzzled than offended by this strange anger.

She flung herself without hesitation into the opening that this answer gave her. "What d'you mean, she's not silly?" she exclaimed, irritated and almost surprised. "My dear man, even a blind man could see it . . . She's beautiful, certainly, but completely stupid . . . a beautiful animal . . . How can you fail to see that?"

"I like her as she is," he hazarded.

"A goose . . . A fool . . . the Côte d'Azur . . . Just a little provincial miss without a crumb of brain . . . The Côte d'Azur, indeed . . . why not Monté Carlo then, or Deauville? . . . or even just the Eiffel Tower?" She seemed beside herself with rage—which, to Marcello's mind, was a sure sign that there had been some unpleasant discussion between her and Giulia while they were dancing together.

"Don't worry about my wife," he said gently. "Just come to the hotel tomorrow morning . . . Giulia will have to accept the fact that you're there . . . and we'll all three go to Versailles."

She threw him a look almost of hope. But then anger prevailed again and she said, "What an absurd ideal . . . Your wife said quite clearly that she did not want me to come . . . and I haven't the habit of going where I'm not wanted."

Marcello answered simply, "Well, I want you to come."

"Yes, but your wife doesn't."

"What does it matter to you about my wife? Isn't it enough that you and I love each other?"

She studied him uneasily and mistrustfully, pulling back her head, her soft, arching breast close against his. "Really," she said, "you talk of our love as if we'd been lovers for goodness knows how long . . . But d'you think we love each other seriously?"

Marcello would have liked to say, "Why don't you love me? I could love you so much." But the words died on his lips, like echoes smothered by an impassable remoteness. It seemed to him that he had never loved her so much as at this moment, when, forcing pretence to the point of parody, she insincerely asked him if he were sure he loved her. At last, sadly, he said, "You know I wish we loved each other."

"So do I," she answered vaguely; and it was clear that she was thinking of Giulia. Then, as though waking up to reality, she added with sudden rage, "In any case, please don't kiss me again in the car or anywhere like that . . . I've never been able to bear effusions of that

kind . . . They seem to me to show not only a lack of consideration but a lack of breeding as well."

"You haven't yet told me," he said, clenching his teeth, whether you are coming to Versailles tomorrow."

He saw her hesitate, and then, perplexed, she asked, "Do you really think your wife won't be annoyed when she sees me arriving? . . . She won't insult me as she did today at the restaurant?"

"I'm sure she won't. She may be a bit surprised, that's all. But before you come I'll be sure and bring her round."

"Will you be able to?"

"Yes."

"I have the impression that your wife can't endure me," she said in a questioning tone, as though waiting to be reassured.

"You're wrong," he replied, gratifying her half-expressed wish, "on the contrary, she likes you very much."

"Really?"

"Yes, really . . . She was telling me so only today."

"And what did she say?"

"Oh Lord, nothing very special . . . That you were beautiful, that you seemed intelligent . . . the truth, in fact."

"I'll come, then," she decided, "I'll come immediately after my husband leaves . . . about nine . . . so that we can catch the ten o'clock train . . . I'll come to your hotel."

Marcello resented this haste, this relief, on her part, as yet another offence to his own feeling for her. And, kindled suddenly by an indefinable longing for a love-relationship of any kind, even a false, ambiguous one, he said, "I'm so glad you've decided to come."

"Yes?"

"Yes, because I don't think you'd have done it unless you loved me."

"I might have done it for some other reason," she replied maliciously.

"What reason?"

"We women are spiteful . . . just to be spiteful to our wife."

So she thought only of Giulia, all the time. Marcello said nothing, but, still dancing, guided her toward the entrance door. Two more turns, and they found themselves right in front of the cloakroom, one step from the door. "But where are you taking me?" she asked.

"Listen," pleaded Marcello in a low voice, so that the attendant, standing behind the counter, could not hear him, "let's go out into the street for a moment."

"What for?"

"There's no one there . . . I want you to give me a kiss . . . of your own accord . . . to show me that you really love me."

"I shouldn't dream of such a thing," she said, her anger flaring up again suddenly.

"But why? . . . It's a deserted street, quite dark . . ."

"I've already told you that I can't bear these public displays."

"Please."

"Leave me alone," she said, in a hard, loud voice; and she disengaged herself and went quickly back to the dance floor. Marcello, as though swept away by her outburst, crossed the threshold and went out into the street.

The street, as he had told Lina, was dark and deserted, and the pavements, dimly lit by infrequent lampposts, were bare of passers-by. On the far side of the street, under the high garden wall, stood a few cars. Marcello took his handkerchief from his pocket and stood looking at the leafy tree tops above the wall as he wiped his sweating brow. He felt stunned, as if he had received a sharp, violent blow over the head. He did not remember ever having so humbly entreated a woman before, and was almost ashamed of having done so. At the same time he realized that all hope of inducing Lina not so much to love him as simply, even, to understand him, had now vanished. At that moment he heard behind him the sound of a car engine, and then the car itself slid up beside him and stopped. There was a light inside; and at the wheel Marcello saw the figure—looking just like that of a family chauffeur—of the Secret Service agent Orlando. His companion with the long, thin, bird-of-prey face sat beside him. "Sir," whispered Orlando.

At the hotel they all got out of the car to say their farewells. Quadri, after hurriedly shaking hands with Marcello and Giulia, went back to the car. Lina dalli moment to say something to Giulia, and then Giulia said good-bye to her and went into the hotel. For a moment Lina and Marcello were left alone on the pavement. "Till tomorrow, then," said Quadri in an embarrassed way. "Till tomorrow," she echoed, bowing and smiling in her so manner. Then she turned away from him; and he joined Giulia in the hall of the hotel.

CHAPTER 17

WHEN Marcello awoke and turned his eyes up toward the ceiling, in the dim, uncertain light of half-closed shutters, he remembered immediately that at that hour Quadri was already driving over the roads of France, following at a short distance by Orlando and his men; and he realized that the visit to Paris was over. The visit was over, he repeated to himself, although the visit had scarcely begun. It was over because, with Quadri's death—which was already, so to speak, paid for—he had brought to conclusion that period of his life during which he had tried by every possible means to rid himself of the burden of solitude and abnormality with which Lino's death had left him. He had succeeded in this at the price of a crime, or, rather, of what would have been a crime if he had not known how to justify it and give it a meaning. As far as he himself was concerned, he was sure that such justification would not be wanting. As a good husband, a good father, a good citizen, he would see his life slowly but steadily acquiring the completeness it had hitherto lacked; and this too was thanks to Quadri's death which, once and for all, precluded any turning back. So it was that Lino's death, that had been the first cause of his somber tragedy, would be nullified and canceled out by Quadri's, just as, once upon a time, the expiatory sacrifice

of an innocent human victim nullified and canceled out the guilt of a previous crime. But it was not only he himself that was concerned. The justification of his life and of the murder of Quadri did not depend only on him. "The time has come," he argued lucidly, "when others must do their duty too . . . otherwise I shall be left alone, with this dead man on my hands, and in the end I shall have merely added nothing to nothing." The others, as he well knew, were the government he had agreed to serve by means of this murder, the social system that expressed itself in that same government, and the nation itself that accepted the guidance of that social system. It would not be enough to say: "I have done my duty . . . I have acted in this way because I was ordered to do so." Such a justification might suffice for Orlando the Secret Service man, but not for him. What was needed, for him, was the complete success of that government, that social system, that nation; and not merely an external success but an intimate, essential success as well. Only in that way could what was normally considered an ordinary crime become, instead, a positive step in a necessary direction. In other words, there must be brought about, thanks to forces that did not depend on him, a complete transformation of values. Injustice must become justice; treachery, heroism; death, life. At this point he felt the need to express his own position in crude, sarcastic words, and said to himself coldly, "If, in fact, fascism is a failure, if all the blackguards and incompetents and imbeciles in Rome bring the Italian nation to ruin, then I'm nothing but a wretched murderer." But he immediately made a mental correction. "And yet, as things are now, I couldn't have done otherwise."

Giulia, who was still asleep beside him, stirred, and with a slow, strong, gradual movement clasped him tightly, first with her two arms, then with her legs, and laid her head on his chest. Marcello made no resistance, but he put out his arm and took up the little luminous clock on the bed table to look at the time. It was a quarter past nine. If things had gone as Orlando had led him to suppose they would, at this moment at some point or other on some French highway, Quadri's car must be lying aban-

done in a ditch with a corpse at the wheel. Giulia murmured, "What time is it?"

"A quarter past nine."

"Ugh, how late it is," she said without moving. "We've slept at least nine hours."

"You see how tired we must have been."

"Aren't we going to Versailles?"

"Yes, of course . . . In fact we ought to get dressed," he said with a sigh, "Signora Quadri will soon be here."

"I'd much rather she wasn't coming . . . She never leaves me in peace, with her love-making."

Marcello said nothing. After a moment Giulia went on: "And what's the program for the next few days?"

Before he could prevent himself, Marcello replied, "We must go home," in a voice that sounded to him positively mournful, from the melancholy he was feeling.

Giulia now roused herself and, pulling back her head and shoulders a little but not letting go of him, asked in an astonished voice, in alarm, "Go home? So soon? We've barely arrived and we've got to go back already?"

"I didn't tell you yesterday," he lied, "because I didn't want to spoil the evening for you . . . But in the afternoon I got a telegram recalling me to Rome."

"Oh, what a pity! . . . what a dreadful pity!" said Giulia in a good-natured, already resigned tone, "just when I was beginning to enjoy Paris . . . Besides, we haven't seen anything."

"D'you mind very much?" he asked her gently, stroking her head.

"No, but I should have liked to stay a few days at any rate . . . if only to get some idea of Paris."

"We'll come back again."

There was silence. Then Giulia, with a lively movement of her arms and her whole body, pressed up against him and said: "Well, tell me anyhow what we're going to do in the future . . . What's our life going to be?"

"Why d'you want to know that?"

"Never mind," she answered, snuggling up against him. "Because I like so much to talk about the future . . . in bed . . . in the dark."

"Well," began Marcello in a calm, colorless voice, "we go back now to Rome and look for a place to live."

"How big a place?"

"Four or five rooms plus offices . . . Having found it, we buy everything necessary to furnish it."

"I should like a flat on the ground floor," she said in a dreamy voice, "with a garden . . . not a big one . . . but with trees and flowers, so that one could sit out in it when it's fine."

"Nothing could be easier," Marcello agreed. "Then we'll set up house . . . I think I'll have enough money to furnish it completely . . . not with expensive things, of course . . ."

"You must have a nice study of your own," she said.

"Why should I have a study, considering that I work in an office . . . Better a good big living room."

"Yes, a living room, drawing room and dining room combined. And we'll have a nice bedroom too, shan't we?"

"Yes, of course."

"But none of those dreary old-fashioned beds . . . I want a real proper bedroom, with a proper double bed . . . And tell me . . . we'll have a nice kitchen too?"

"Certainly we'll have a nice kitchen, why not?"

"I want to have a double stove, with gas and electricity. . . And I want a nice refrigerator too . . . If we haven't enough money, these things can be bought by installments. That will make it easier."

"Yes, of course . . . by installments."

"And tell me, what are we going to do in this house?"

"We're going to live in it and be happy."

"I do need so much to be happy," she said, cuddling up even closer to him, "so very much . . . If you knew . . . It seems to me I've needed to be happy ever since I was born."

"Well, we will be happy," said Marcello with almost aggressive firmness.

"And shall we have children?"

"Of course."

"I want lots of them," she said with a kind of singsong intonation, "I want one every year, at least for the first four years of our marriage . . . so that then we shall have

a family and I want to have a family as quickly as possible . . . It seems to me that one oughtn't to wait, otherwise it may be too late . . . And when one has a family, all the rest comes of itself, doesn't it?"

"Of course, all the rest comes of itself."

She was silent a moment and then asked, "D'you think I'm with child already?"

"How could I know?"

"If I am," she said with a laugh, "it would mean that our child was begotten in the train."

"Would you like that?"

"Yes, it would be a lucky sign for him . . . You never know, he might become a great traveler . . . The first child I want to be a boy . . . then I'd rather the second was a girl . . . I'm sure she'd be very beautiful . . . You're good-looking and I'm not exactly ugly . . . We two certainly ought to have very lovely children."

Marcello said nothing and Giulia went on, "Why are you so silent? Wouldn't you like to have children by me?"

"Of course I should," he replied; and all of a sudden he felt, to his astonishment, two tears spout out of his eyes and trickle down his cheeks. And then two more, hot and scalding, like tears already wept some time long past, that had lain within his eyes to be infused with burning sorrow. He knew that what made him weep was Giulia's talk of happiness of a few minutes before, and yet he was unable to define the reason of it. Perhaps it was because this happiness had been paid for in advance at so dear a price; perhaps because he realized that he would never be able to be happy, not, anyhow, in the simple, affectionate way described by Giulia. With an effort he at last repressed his desire to weep, and, without Giulia's noticing it, wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. Giulia, meanwhile, was embracing him more and more closely, clinging to him desirously with her body, seeking to guide his listless, inattentive hands to caress and enfold her. Then he felt her bend her face toward his and begin kissing him repeatedly on his cheeks and his mouth, on his brow and on his chin, with a kind of frantic, childish eagerness. Finally she whispered to him, in an almost mournful tone, "Why won't you come to me . . . Come

and take me," and he seemed to detect in her voice of entreaty something like a reproof for having thought more of his own happiness than of hers. And then, while he was embracing her, penetrating, gently and easily, into her, and while she, beneath him, her head thrown back on the pillow, her eyes closed, was beginning to raise and lower her hips with a regular, composed, vaguely thoughtful motion, like that of a wave rising and falling with the ebb and flow of the tide—at that moment there was a loud knock on the door and a voice called: "Express Messenger!"

"What can it be?" she murmured, panting, half opening her eyes; "don't move . . . What does it matter?" Marcello turned his head and could just see, on the floor in the brighter light near the door, a letter which had been pushed in through the crack. At the same moment Giulia became motionless and rigid beneath him, throwing back her head and breathing deeply and pressing her fingernails into his arms. She twisted her head on the pillow first one way and then the other, and murmured, "Kill me."

Irrationally, Marcello recalled Lino's cry, "Kill me like a dog!" He was conscious of a horrible anxiety sweeping over him. He waited for some time, until Giulia's hands fell back upon the bed; then he turned on the lamp, got up, fetched the letter and came and lay down again beside his wife. Giulia had now curled up with her back to him and her eyes closed. Marcello looked at the letter before putting it down on the edge of the bed, close to her mouth which was still open and panting. The envelope was addressed to "Madame Giulia Clerici" in an obviously feminine hand. "A letter from Signora Quadri," he said.

Giulia, without opening her eyes, murmured, "Give it to me."

A long silence followed. The letter was lying level with Giulia's mouth, in the full light of the lamp. Giulia relaxed and motionless, appeared to be asleep. Then she sighed, opened her eyes, and taking hold of the corner of the letter in one hand, tore open the envelope with her teeth, pulled out the sheet of paper

Marcello saw her smile; then she murmured, "They say that in love the one who flies is the winner . . . Since I treated her badly yesterday evening, she informs me that she has changed her mind and has gone off this morning with her husband . . . She hopes I'll join her . . . *Bon voyage.*"

"She's gone? repeated Marcello.

"Yes, she left at seven this morning with her husband, for Savoy . . . And you know why she's gone? You remember yesterday evening, when I danced with her the second time? It was I who asked her to dance and she was pleased because she hoped I was at last going to take some notice of her . . . Well, I told her, on the contrary, with the greatest frankness, that she must give up all idea of me . . . and that if she went on, I should cease to see her altogether, and that I loved no one but you, and that she must leave me in peace, and that she ought to be ashamed of herself . . . In fact I said so many things to her she almost burst into tears . . . That's why she's gone today . . . You see how she calculated?—I go away so that you can join me again . . . She'll have to wait a bit."

"Yes, she'll have to wait a bit," repeated Marcello.

"In any case I'm very glad she's gone," resumed Guilia. "She was so persistent and tiresome . . . As for joining her again, don't let's even speak of it . . . I don't want ever to see that woman again."

"You won't ever see her again," said Marcello.

CHAPTER 18

The room at the Ministry in which Marcello worked led out on to a lesser courtyard. It was a very small room, unsymmetrical in shape, and contained nothing but a desk and a couple of shelves. It was at the end of a corridor that led nowhere, and was a long way from the waiting room. To get to it Marcello used a back staircase

trunks, and on the ground, half hidden in the long grass difficult to see at a first glance in the confused variation of light and shade, the two bodies. Quadri was lying on his back, and of him nothing could be seen but the shoulders and the head, and of the latter only the chin with the black line of a cut across the throat. Lina was lying half across her husband, and her whole person could be seen. Marcello calmly put down his lighted cigarette on the edge of the ash tray, took up a magnifying glass and scrutinized the photograph with care. Although it was gray and out of focus and indistinct because of the patches of sun and shade in the undergrowth, it showed Lina's body quite recognizably—at the same time both slender and fully formed, both pure and sensual, both beautiful and bizarre, with the broad shoulders below the delicate, thin neck, the full bosom above the wasplike slimness of the waist, the wide hips and the long, elegant legs. Part of her body and her widely spread skirt covered the body of her husband, and it looked as though she were trying to whisper into his ear as she lay there, twisted to one side, her face buried in the grass, her mouth against his cheek.

For a long time Marcello looked at the photograph through the magnifying glass, seeking to examine every line, every shadow, every detail of it. He felt that this picture, filled with a stillness that went beyond the mechanical stillness of the photograph had attained the last, final stillness of death, breathed an atmosphere of enviable peace. The photograph, it seemed to him, was full of the utterly profound silence that must have followed the terrible, lightning-like suddenness of the death agony. A few moments before, all had been confusion, violence, terror, hatred, hope, despair; a few moments, and all was finished, hushed. He remembered that the two bodies had lain for a long time in the undergrowth, almost two days; and he pictured to himself how the sun must have warmed them for many hours and gathered about them the humming life of insects, and how it must then have gone away, slowly leaving them to the silent darkness of the gentle summer night. The dews of night had wept upon their cheeks, the faint wind had murmured in the highest branches and in the bushes of the undergrowth.

With sunrise, the lights and shadows of the day had returned, as if to an appointed meeting place, to play over the two figures as they lay there motionless. Rejoicing in the freshness and pure splendor of the morning, a bird had perched on a branch to sing its song. A bee had circled around Lina's head, a flower had opened beside Quadri's thrown-back forehead. As they lay there silent and still, the chattering waters of the brooks that wound through the forest had spoken to them, the inhabitants of the wood—stealthy squirrels, bounding rabbits—had moved about them. And all the time, beneath them, the earth on which they lay had slowly taken the impression, in its soft bed of grass and moss, of the stiff forms of their bodies, had been preparing, in answer to their mute request, to receive them into its lap.

He started at a knock on the door, threw away the review and called, "Come in!" The door opened slowly and for a moment Marcello could see no one. Then, looking cautiously through the opening, appeared the honest, peaceable, broad face of the Secret Service agent Orlando.

"May I come in, sir?"

"Of course, Orlando," said Marcello in an official tone of voice, "come in. . . Have you something to tell me?"

Orlando came in, closed the door, and walked forward, staring hard at Marcello. And then, for the first time, Marcello noticed that everything about that florid, heated face was good-natured—everything except the eyes, which, small and deep-set below the bald forehead, glittered in a singular manner. "How odd," thought Marcello as he looked at him, "that I hadn't noticed before." He made a sign to Orlando to sit down and the latter obeyed without a word, still staring at him with those brilliant eyes. "Cigarette?" suggested Marcello, holding out his case.

"Thank you, sir," said the other man, taking a cigarette. There was silence for a moment. Then Orlando blew some smoke from his mouth, looked for an instant at the lighted end of his cigarette, and said, "D'you know, sir, what is the most curious thing about the Quadri affair?"

"No, what?"

"That is wasn't necessary."

that he handed to Marcello, who took it and looked at it. It showed five children between thirteen and six years old, standing in a row in order of size, three girls and two boys, all in their best clothes, the girls in white, the boys in sailor suits. All five of them, Marcello observed, had round, peaceable sensible faces very like their father's. "They're in the country with their mother," said Orlando, holding back the photograph Marcello handed to him; "the biggest girl's already working as a dressmaker." "They're fine children, and very like you," said Mar-

"Thank you, sir. . . Well, good-bye then, sir." Orlando, grateful again, bowed twice as he retreated backward. At that moment the door opened and Giulia appeared, and said, "Thank you again, sir, thank you again." Orlando stood aside to let Giulia pass, and then disappeared.

Giulia came in and said immediately, "I was passing your way and I thought I'd pay you a visit. . . How are you?"

"I'm all right," said Marcello.

Standing in front of the desk she looked at him, hesitating, full of doubt and apprehension. Finally she said, "Don't you think you're working too hard?"

"No," answered Marcello, throwing a quick glance at the open window. "Why?"

"You look tired." Giulia walked round the desk and stood still for a little, leaning against the arm of the chair and looking at the newspapers scattered over the table. Then she asked, "No news?"

"About what?"

"In the papers, about the Quadri affair."

"No, nothing."

After a moment's silence, she said, "I feel more and more certain that it was of his own party who killed him. What do you think about it?"

That was the official version of the crime, handed out to the Italian newspapers from the propaganda offices the same morning that the news had arrived from Paris. Giulia, Marcello noticed, had mentioned it with a kind of determined good will, as though she were hoping to

convince herself. He replied drily, "I don't know. It might be so."

"I'm convinced of it," she repeated resolutely. Then, after a moment of hesitation, she went on impulsively: "Sometimes I think that if I hadn't treated Ori's wife so badly that evening, at the night club, she would have stayed in Paris and she wouldn't be dead. And then I have a feeling of remorse. . . But what can I do? It was her fault, because she wouldn't give me a moment's peace."

Marcello wondered whether Giulia had any suspicion of the part he had taken in the killing of Quadri. Thinking it over, he decided against the possibility. In love, he felt, could have stood up to such a disclosure. Giulia was telling the truth: she felt remorse for Ori's death, because—though in a perfectly innocent manner—she had been the indirect cause of it. He wanted to assure her, but could find no better word than the one already pronounced, with such emphasis, by Ori. "You musn't feel remorse," he said, putting his arm round her waist and drawing her toward him, "it was the will of Fate."

Lightly stroking his head, she answered, "I don't believe in Fate. . . The real reason was that I love you. If I didn't love you—who knows?—I might not have treated her so badly, and she wouldn't have gone away and she wouldn't be dead. . . What is there fatal about that?"

Marcello remembered Lino, first cause of all his troubles of his life, and explained to her, thoughtfully, "When one says Fate it's exactly those things that mean, love and all the rest. . . You couldn't help loving as you did, nor could she, indeed, help going away with her husband."

"So we're not really able to do anything?" asked Giulia in a dreamy voice, looking at the papers scattered on the desk.

Marcello hesitated, and then replied, with profound bitterness, "Yes, we're able to know that we're not able to do anything."

"And what's the use of that?"

"You must be sensible, the next time . . . Or so
we were able to"
She walked away from him with a sigh and
a down. "Don't forget to be in good time to-
id at the school in the doormat, "Mumany's go
zily good lunch for us. . . And remember you
ake any appointments for the afternoon . . . W
go and look at those flats." She waved to him a
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Left alone, Marcello took a pair of scissors, c
ut out the photograph from the French review, p
drawer with some other papers and locked the
At that same moment the piercing wail of the r
iren came down into the courtyard from the l
ky above. Immediately afterward church bells, n
far, began to ring.

CHAPTER 1

ING had fallen, and Marcello, who had spent
on the bed smoking and meditating, rose ar
the window. Black in the greenish light of the s
dusk rose the surrounding blocks of flats, each
bare cement courtyard adorned with small green
beds and hedges of clipped myrtle. Here and
window shone red, and in pantries and kitchens on
see menservants in striped working jackets and
in white aprons attending to their household
among painted cupboards or electric stoves. M
looked up above the flat roofs of the buildings to
the last purple vapors of sunset were vanishing
darkening sky; then he looked down again, and
car coming into a courtyard and stopping, and the
getting out, together with a big white dog which
started running about the flower beds, whining and
ing with joy. This was a wealthy quarter, newly
in the last few years, and, looking at those courtyar

windows, nobody would have thought that a war had been going on for four years and that, on that very day, a government that had lasted for twenty years had fallen. Nobody except himself, thought Marcello, and those who found themselves in the same position as he. There flashed upon him, for a moment, the image of a divine rod hanging over the great city as it lay peacefully beneath the clear sky, striking a family here, a family there, bringing terror and dismay and affliction upon them; while the neighbors remained unharmed. His own family was among those smitten, as he knew and as he had foreseen ever since the beginning of the war: a family just like other families, with the same affections and the same intimate ways, a perfectly normal family, possessing the normality that he had sought after with such tenacity for so many years and which was now revealed as a purely external thing entirely made up of abnormalities.

He remembered how he had said to his wife, on the day the war broke out in Europe, "If I was logical, I ought to commit suicide today"; and he remembered also the terror that those words had aroused in her. It was as though she had known what they concealed, not merely that she foresaw an unfavorable outcome to the conflict. Once again he had wondered whether Giulia knew the truth about him and about the part he had taken in Quadri's death; and once again it seemed to him impossible that she could know, although, from certain indications, one might well suppose the contrary.

He realized now, with perfect clarity, that he had, as they say, backed the wrong horse; but why he had backed it in that way, and why the horse had not won—this, apart from the most obviously established facts, was not clear to him. He would have liked to be certain that all that had happened had had to happen; that, in fact, he could not have backed any other horse nor arrived at any different result: and he had a greater need of this certainty than of any liberation from a remorse that he did not feel. For him, the only remorse possible was for his mistake—that is, for having done what he had done without any absolute and fatal necessity. For having, in fact, either deliberately or involuntarily—ignored the possi-

"It's useful to ourselves; the next time. . . Or for other
who come after us."

She walked away from him with a sigh and went to
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aid as she stood in the doorway; "Mummy's got a special
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make any appointments for the afternoon . . . We've got
to go and look at those flats." She waved to him and van-
ished.

Left alone, Marcello took a pair of scissors, carefully
cut out the photograph from the French review, put it in
a drawer with some other papers and locked the drawer.
At that same moment the piercing wail of the noonday
siren came down into the courtyard from the burning
sky above. Immediately afterward church bells, near at
hand, began to ring.

CHAPTER 19

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ity of doing things that were entirely different. But if he could have the certainty that this was not true—well, then it seemed to him that he could be at peace with himself, even if only in his usual dim, colorless manner. In other words, he thought, he must be sure of having recognized his own destiny and of having accepted it as it was, as a thing useful to others and to himself perhaps in a merely negative way, but useful nevertheless.

He was comforted, meanwhile, in the midst of his doubts by the idea that, even if he had been wrong—a possibility that could not be excluded—he had yet staked more than anyone else, more than all those who found themselves in the same position as himself. This was a comfort to his pride, the only comfort now left him. Others would be able, tomorrow, to change their ideas, their party, their lives, their very characters. For him, however, this was impossible—not merely with respect to others, but to his own self as well. He had done what he had done for reasons entirely of his own, regardless of any communion with other people. To change now, even if it had been permitted him, would mean annihilation of himself. And that, of all the many methods of extinction, was the one he most wished to avoid.

At this point it occurred to him that, if he had been wrong, his first and greatest mistake had been in wishing to escape from his own abnormality and in seeking some kind of normality through which to communicate with other people. This mistake had had its origin in a powerful instinct. Unfortunately the normality that this instinct had happened to light upon was nothing more than an empty shell, inside which everything was abnormal and motiveless. At the first knock, this shell had been broken to pieces; and the instinct, so well justified and so human, had turned him from a victim into an executioner. His mistake had been not so much that he had killed Quadri, as that he had attempted, with inadequate means, to obliterate the original flaw in his own life. But, he wondered again, might it perhaps have been possible for things to have gone differently?

No, it would not have been possible, he thought, answering his own question. Lino had had to set a trap

for his innocence, and he, to defend himself, had had to kill him, and afterward, in order to rid himself, of his resulting sense of abnormality had had to seek after normality in the way he had done; and in order to obtain this normality had had to pay a price equivalent to the burden of abnormality of which he intended to rid himself; and that price had been the death of Quadri. Everything, therefore, though freely accepted, had been ordained by fate, just as everything had been at the same time both right and wrong.

All these things were not so much thoughts as feelings, of which he was acutely and painfully conscious, with a sensation of anguish he rejected and defied. He wanted to be calm and detached in face of the disaster to his own life, as though he were watching some gloomy but remote spectacle. His sensation of anguish made him suspect the existence of a panic relationship between himself and outside events, in spite of the clearness with which he forced himself to examine them. In any case it was not easy, at this moment, to distinguish between clearness and fear; and perhaps the best course was to maintain, as always, a decorous, impassive attitude. After all, he said to himself, almost without irony and as though adding up the total of his own modest ambitions, he had nothing to lose—provided that loss was understood to mean the sacrifice of his mediocre position as a government official, of this home that had to be paid for by installments in twenty-five years, of the car, which also had to be paid for within two years, and of a few other oddments of comfort that he had felt Giulia must be allowed to have. He had really nothing to lose. And if they had come at that moment to arrest him, the scantiness of the material advantages he had derived from his position would have astonished even his enemies.

He left the window and turned back into the room. It contained, as Giulia had wished, a large double bed, and the furniture was of shining, bronze handles and ornaments, in "pire" style. It occurred to him that he had bought on the installment plan and had finished paying for it only the

whole of our life," he said to himself sarcastically, taking his jacket from the chair and putting it on, "is on the installment plan . . . but the last ones are the biggest and we shall never manage to pay them." He pushed back the rumpled bedside rug with his foot and went out of the room.

He went along the passage to a half-closed door at the other end, through which a little light was visible. It was his daughter's bedroom, and he paused a moment as he went in at the door and saw, with incredulity, the familiar, everyday scene that faced him. It was a small room, done up in the pretty, gaily colored style suitable to rooms in which children sleep and live. The furniture was painted pink, the curtains were pale blue, and the walls were covered with a paper that had a design of little baskets of flowers. On the carpet, also pink, were scattered untidily a number of dolls of varying sizes, as well as other toys. His wife was sitting beside the bed, in which lay Lucilla, their child. Giulia, who was talking to the child, turned slightly as he came in and cast a lingering glance at him, without, however, saying anything. Marcello took one of the little painted chairs and sat down beside the bed. "Good evening, Daddy," said the little girl.

"Good evening, Lucilla," replied Marcello, looking at her. She was a dark, delicate-looking child with a round face, enormous, melting eyes, and very fine features—features so excessively dainty that they looked almost affected. He did not know why, but at that moment she seemed to him to be too pretty and also too conscious of her own prettiness, in a manner that might well be a first sign of innocent coquettishness and that reminded him, unpleasingly, of his mother, whom the child strongly resembled. This coquettishness was noticeable in the way she rolled her big, velvety eyes when speaking to him or to her mother—an effect that was indeed odd in a child of six; and also in the extreme, almost unbelievable assurance of her conversation. In her blue nightgown, all lace and puffed sleeves, she was sitting up in bed with hands clasped, in the midst of her evening prayers which were interrupted by the entrance of her father. "Come on,

Lucilla, don't sit there dreaming," said her mother in a good-natured way. "Come on, say your prayers after me."

"I'm not dreaming," said the child, turning her eyes up to the ceiling with an impatient, prim grimace. "It was you who stopped when Daddy came in . . . so I stopped too."

"You're quite right," said Giulia, unmoved, "but you know the prayer perfectly well. . . You could have gone on by yourself. . . When you're bigger, I won't always be there to help you. . . But you'll still have to say it."

"Look what a lot of time you make me waste . . . and I'm so tired," said the child, raising her shoulders slightly but keeping her hands clasped. "You start arguing, and I could have finished saying my prayers by now."

"Come along," repeated Giulia, smiling now in spite of herself, "let's begin again from the beginning: 'Hail Mary, full of grace.'"

The little girl repeated in a drawling voice, "Hail Mary, full of grace."

"The Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women."

"The Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women."

"And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus."

"And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus."

"Can I rest a moment?" asked the child at this point.

"Why?" asked Giulia. "Are you tired already?"

"You've kept me like this for an hour, with my hands clasped," said the child, pulling her hands apart and looking at her father. "When Daddy came in we'd already said half the prayer." She rubbed her arms with her hands, making a disdainful, flirtatious display of her own weariness. Then she clasped her hands again, and said, "I'm ready now."

"Holy Mary, mother of God," Giulia resumed quietly.

"Holy Mary, mother of God," repeated the child.

"Pray for us sinners."

"Pray for us sinners."

"Now and at the hour of our death."

"Now and at the hour of our death."

"So be it."

"So be it."

"But, you, Daddy, don't you ever say your prayers?" asked the child, without any transition.

"We say them in the evening before we go to bed," replied Giulia hurriedly. The child, however, was looking at Marcello with a questioning and incredulous air. He hastened to confirm what Giulia had said. "Of course, every evening before we go to bed."

"Now lie down and go to sleep," said Giulia, rising and trying to make the child lie flat. She managed to do this, but not without some difficulty, for Lucilla did not seem at all disposed to go to sleep; then she pulled up to the child's chin the single sheet which was the only covering on the bed.

"I'm hot," said the child, kicking at the sheet. "I'm hot."

"Tomorrow we're going to Granny's and you won't be hot any more," answered Giulia.

"Where's Granny?"

"Up in the hills. . . It's cool there."

"But where?"

"I've told you dozens of times—Tagliacozzo. . . It's a cool place and we're going to stay there all the summer."

"But won't the airplanes come there?"

"The airplanes won't come any more."

"Why?"

"Because the war's over."

"And why is the war over?"

"Because two and two don't make three," said Giulia brusquely but not ill-humoredly. "Now that's enough questions. . . Go to sleep, because we're leaving early tomorrow morning. . . I'm just going to fetch your medicine." She went out, leaving father and daughter alone together.

"Daddy," asked the little girl immediately, sitting up in bed again, "d'you remember the cat belonging to the uncle who lives underneath

"The little girls' governess told me that they can give me one of the kittens. . . Can I have it? I could take it to Tagliacozzo."

"But when were these kittens born?" asked Marcello.

"The day before yesterday."

"Then it's impossible," said Marcello, stroking his daughter's head. "The kittens must stay with their mother until they can take milk. . . You can have it when you come back from Tagliacozzo."

"Supposing we don't come back from Tagliacozzo?"

"Why shouldn't we come back? We're coming back at the end of the summer," replied Marcello, twisting his fingers in his daughter's soft brown hair.

"Ooo, you're hurting me," wailed the child instantly, at the first touch.

Marcello let go of her hair and said, with a smile, "Why d'you say I hurt you? . . . You know it's not true."

"But you *did* hurt me," she replied emphatically. She put her hands up to her forehead, in a willful, feminine sort of way. "Now I shall have a terrible headache."

"Then I shall pull your ears," said Marcello jokingly. Delicately he lifted the hair over the little round, pink ear and gave it the faintest pull, shaking it like a bell.

"Ooo, ooo, ooo," cried the child in a shrill voice, pretending to be hurt, a slight blush spreading over her face, "you're hurting me."

"You see what a little liar you are," said Marcello reprovingly, letting go of her ear. "You know, you oughtn't to tell lies."

"That time," she said sagaciously, "I promise you did really hurt me."

"D'you want me to give you one of your dolls for the night?" asked Marcello, looking down at the carpet where the toys lay scattered.

She cast a quietly scornful glance at the dolls and answered in a self-possessed manner, "If you like."

"If *I* like?" asked Marcello, smiling. "You talk as if it was you who were giving me a pleasure. . . Don't you like having a doll to sleep with?"

"Yes I do," she conceded. "Giv

"But, you, Daddy, don't you ever say your prayers?" asked the child, without any transition.

"We say them in the evening before we go to bed," replied Giulia hurriedly. The child, however, was looking at Marcello with a questioning and incredulous air. He hastened to confirm what Giulia had said. "Of course, every evening before we go to bed."

"Now lie down and go to sleep," said Giulia, rising and trying to make the child lie flat. She managed to do this, but not without some difficulty, for Lucilla did not seem at all disposed to go to sleep; then she pulled up to the child's chin the single sheet which was the only covering on the bed.

"I'm hot," said the child, kicking at the sheet. "I'm so hot."

"Tomorrow we're going to Granny's and you won't be hot any more," answered Giulia.

"Where's Granny?"

"Up in the hills. . . It's cool there."

"But where?"

"I've told you dozens of times—Tagliacozzo. . . It's a cool place and we're going to stay there all the summer."

"But won't the airplanes come there?"

"The airplanes won't come any more."

"Why?"

"Because the war's over."

"And why is the war over?"

"Because two and two don't make three," said Giulia brusquely but not ill-humoredly. "Now that's enough questions. . . Go to sleep, because we're leaving early tomorrow morning. . . I'm just going to fetch your medicine." She went out, leaving father and daughter alone together.

"Daddy," asked the little girl immediately, sitting up in bed again, "d'you remember the cat belonging to the people who live underneath?"

"Yes," replied Marcello, rising from his chair and coming across to sit on the edge of the bed.

"It's had four kittens."

"Well?"

the little girls' governess told me that they can give me of the kittens. . . Can I have it? I could take it Tagliacozzo."

"When were these kittens born?" asked Marcello. "The day before yesterday."

"Even if it's impossible," said Marcello, stroking his daughter's head. "The kittens must stay with their mother until they can take milk. . . You can have it when you come back from Tagliacozzo."

"Supposing we don't come back from Tagliacozzo?"

"Why shouldn't we come back? We're coming back at the end of the summer," replied Marcello, twisting his fingers in his daughter's soft brown hair.

"Ooo, you're hurting me," wailed the child instantly, at the first touch.

Marcello let go of her hair and said, with a smile, "Did you say I hurt you? . . . You know it's not true."

"But you *did* hurt me," she replied emphatically. She raised her hands up to her forehead, in a willful, feminine way. "Now I shall have a terrible headache."

"When I shall pull your ears," said Marcello jokingly.

Instantly he lifted the hair over the little round, pink ear and gave it the faintest pull, shaking it like a bell.

"Ooo, ooo, ooo," cried the child in a shrill voice, pretending to be hurt, a slight blush spreading over her cheeks. "You're hurting me."

"You see what a little liar you are," said Marcello sternly, letting go of her ear. "You know, you don't tell lies."

"At that time," she said sagaciously, "I promise you didn't hurt me."

"Do you want me to give you one of your dolls for the kitten?" asked Marcello, looking down at the carpet where the toys lay scattered.

She cast a quietly scornful glance at the dolls and answered in a self-possessed manner, "If you like."

"If I like?" asked Marcello, smiling. "You talk as if you were giving *me* a pleasure. Don't you like having a doll to sleep with?"

"Yes I do," she conceded. "Give me one."

looking down at the carpet, "give me that one with the pink dress."

Marcello also looked down. "They've all got pink dresses," he said.

"There's pink and pink," said the child, in an ignorant, know-all kind of way. "The pink of the doll is exactly the same as the pink of the pink rose on the balcony."

"Is this the one?" asked Marcello, taking up from the shelf the finest and largest of the dolls.

"You see, you don't know anything about it," she said severely. She jumped out of bed, ran barefoot to the corner of the carpet, and picking up an extremely ugly doll with a squashed and blackened face, hurried back to bed again, saying, "There you are!" This time she lay down quietly under the sheet, on her back, her placid face pressed affectionately against the surprised-looking face of the doll. Giulia came in a moment with a bottle and a spoon.

"Come along," she said, going up to the bed, "for your medicine." The little girl obeyed promptly. She sat half up in the bed, stretching out her face with her mouth open, like a little bird about to be fed. Giulia put the spoon into her mouth, then tilted it quickly to let the liquid run out. The child lay down again, saying, "How tasty it is!"

"Well, good night," said Giulia stooping to kiss the child's forehead.

"Good night, Mummy, good night, Daddy," said the child in her shrill voice. Marcello kissed her on the forehead and then followed his wife. Giulia turned out the light and closed the door.

In the passage, she half turned toward her husband and said, "I think it's ready." Marcello then noticed for the first time, in that revealing dimness, that Giulia's eyes were swollen as if with weeping. His visit to the child had cheered him; but when he saw his wife's face he began to be afraid again that he would not be able to appear as calm and firm as he wished. Giulia had led him in front of him into the dining room, an extremely small room with a little round table and a sideboard.

less?" His answer, at that time—if he had the gift of prophecy—would have been, "Kill Quadri." But now? He put down the fork at the side of his plate, and as soon as he could be sure that his voice would not tremble, he answered, "I don't understand what you're talking about."

He saw her lower her eyes, with a grimace as though she were weeping. Then she said, in a slow, sad voice, "Lina told me in Paris—perhaps because she wanted to get me away from you—that you were in the Secret Police."

"And what did you answer her?"

"That it didn't matter to me if you were . . . that you were your wife and that I loved you, whatever you did. . . . that if you were doing that, it meant you thought it was the right thing to do."

Marcello said nothing, deeply moved, in spite of himself, by this obtuse, unshakable loyalty. Giulia continued in a hesitating voice, "But then, when Quadri and Lina were killed, I was terrified that you had something to do with it . . . and I've never been able to stop thinking about it. . . . But I never said anything to you because, you'd never told me anything about your profession and I thought there was all the more reason why I could not speak about *this*."

"And what do you think now?" asked Marcello after a moment's silence.

"What do I think?" said Giulia, raising her eyes and looking at him. Marcello saw that her eyes were shining and he knew that those tears already gave him his answer. She added, however, with an effort, "You yourself told me in Paris that the visit to Quadri was very important for your career. . . . So I think it may be true."

He answered at once, "It is true."

He realized, simultaneously, that Giulia had been honest, up to the very last moment, that he would contradict her. And indeed, at his words, as though they had been a signal, she threw her head down on the table, buried her face in her arm and started sobbing. Marcello got up and went over to the door and turned the key. Then he went up to her, and without bending down placed his hand on her hair and said, "If you like, we'll separate, from tomorrow on. . . . I'll take you and the child to Tagliacozzo and"

then I'll go away and you needn't see me any more. D'you think that would be the best thing?"

Giulia at once stopped sobbing—just as though it seemed to him, she had not been able to believe her ears. Then, from the hollow of her arm, where her head was hidden, came her voice, sad and surprised, "What do you mean? Separate? . . . It's not that . . . I'm so frightened for you. . . What will they do to me now?"

So Giulia, he said to himself, felt no horror of himself. It was not that he did not feel regret for the deaths of Quadri and Lina. It was merely fear on his behalf, fear for his life, for his future. Such insensibility, coupled with such love, affected him strangely; it was like going upstairs in the dark and lifting your foot, thinking to find another step, and instead finding only emptiness because you have reached the landing. He had, in reality, foreseen and even heeded a feeling of horror and a severe verdict from heaven. Instead of which, he found only the usual blind, loyal obedience. Somewhat impatiently, he said, "They won't do anything to me. . . There are no proofs . . . and in any case they are only carrying out orders." He hesitated a moment, feeling a kind of bashfulness, mixed with repugnance, for a commonplace remark; then, with an effort, concluded, "I only did my duty, just as a soldier would."

Giulia quickly snatched at this worn and hackneyed phrase which, not so long ago, had not sufficed to tranquillize even Orlando, the Secret Service man. "I thought of that," she said, lifting her head and then taking his hand and kissing it frantically, "I always said to myself, 'Marcello, after all, is just like a soldier. . . Soldiers, also, kill because they're ordered to do so. . . No fault of his if they make him do certain things. . . Don't you really think they'll come and take you? . . . I'm sure the people who gave you the order to escape . . . and that you, on the other hand, you have nothing to do with it and who only did your duty will be the one to suffer. . .'" After having kissed the back of his hand she turned it over and started kissing the palm with equal fury.

"Don't worry," said Marcello, stroking her head.

the present they'll have other things to do besides looking for me."

"But people are so dreadful. . . If there's even just one person who hates you . . . they'll denounce you. . . Besides, it's always like that. The big people, the ones who give orders and who've made millions, get away; while the little ones like you, who have done their duty and haven't saved a penny, are the ones who suffer. . . Oh Marcello, I'm so frightened."

"You mustn't be frightened, everything will come right."

"Ah, but I know it won't come right. I feel it. . . And I'm so tired." Giulia spoke now with her face pressed against his hand, but no longer kissing it. "After Lucilla arrived, although I knew what your profession was, I used to think: now I'm properly established, I've got a baby, a husband that I love, I've got a home and a family, I'm happy, truly happy. . . It was the first time in my life that I'd been happy and it seemed too good to be true. . . I could hardly believe it . . . and I was always so much afraid that everything would come to an end and that the happiness wouldn't last. . . And indeed it hasn't lasted, and now we've got to run away. . . And you'll lose your job and goodness knows what they'll do to you. . . And that poor little creature will be worse off than if she was an orphan. . . And everything will have to be started all over again. . . And perhaps it won't even be possible to start again and our family life will be broken up." She burst into tears and buried her face in her arm again.

All of a sudden Marcello recalled the image that had flashed across his mind earlier—the divine rod pitilessly smiting his whole family, himself, the guilty one, and his wife, and child who were innocent, and he shuddered at the thought. There was a knock at the door and he shouted to the servant that they had finished and didn't need her any more. Then, bending down towards Giulia, he said gently, "Please don't go on crying, and don't worry. . . Our family life won't be broken up. . . We'll go away to America, or to Argentina, and make a new life for ourselves. . . We'll have a home there, and I'll be there, and

appens to you, I'd rather be there. . . After all, the raid can see to the child."

"But don't be afraid . . . the planes won't come tonight."

"I'm going to change," she said, leaving the room.

Left alone, Marcello crossed over to the window again. There was somebody going down the stairs in the opposite building,—a man. The dark outline of his figure could be seen through the opaque window panes, descending slowly from floor to floor. He walked down in a self-possessed sort of way, to judge by the slenderness of his outline. He must be a young man thought Marcello enviously, he was whistling. Then the radio started to blare again. Marcello heard the usual voice winding up as if at the end of a speech, with the words, ". . . the war continues." It was the message of the new government that he had already heard shortly before. He took out his case and lit a cigarette.

CHAPTER 20

THE suburban streets were deserted, silent, dark, although dead, like the extremities of some large body whose blood has suddenly collected all in one spot. But as the car drew nearer to the center of the city Marcello and Giulia saw more and more groups of people gesticulating and shouting. At a crossroad Marcello slowed down and stopped while a line of trucks went past, packed with boys and young women waving flags and placards with slogans on them. These overloaded, flag-decked trucks with people clinging to the mudguards and the footboards were greeted with confused applause by the crowds thronging the pavements. Someone stuck his head in at the window of Marcello's car and shouted "Long live Freedom!" in Giulia's face, disappearing immediately afterward although sucked back into the multitude that swarmed all

around. Giulia said, "Wouldn't it be better to go back home?"

"Why?" replied Marcello, surveying the street through the glass of the windshield. "They're all so pleased. . . They're certainly not thinking of doing any harm to anyone. . . We'll leave the car somewhere and then walk about and see what's going on."

"Won't they steal the car?"

"Don't be absurd."

Marcello drove the car through the crowded streets in the center of the town in his usual thoughtful, composed, patient manner. In spite of the gloom of the black-out, it was possible to distinguish quite clearly the movements of the crowd, with groups of people forming and groups encountering each other and then scattering and running here and there—all the movements shifting and varying, yet all animated by the same single, sincere exultation at the fall of the dictatorship. People who did not know each other embraced in the middle of the street. Here someone, after standing still for a long time, dumb and attentive, as a flag-decked truck drove past, suddenly took off his hat and yelled applause; there someone was running like a dispatch-bearer, from group to group, repeating phrases of encouragement and rejoicing; someone else, seized with a sudden fury of hatred, lifted a threatening fist at a dark, closed building that had been the seat of some public office. Marcello noticed there were large numbers of women on their husbands' arms, sometimes with their children too—a thing that had not happened for a long time, in the forced public manifestations of the fallen regime. Columns of determined-looking men, united, apparently, by some secret party bond, formed and marched past for a moment or two amid applause, and then seemed to be lost in the crowd; large, approving groups surrounded any impromptu orator; others gathered to sing hymns of freedom at the top of their voices. Marcello drove gently and patiently respecting each concourse of people and advancing very slowly. "How pleased they all are!" said Giulia, in a good-natured, companionable tone, forgetting both her fears and her own interests.

"In their place I should be too."

They went some distance up the Corso, through the crowd, following two or three other slowly moving cars; then, at a narrow side street, Marcello turned, and, after waiting for a column of demonstrators to pass, managed to drive into it. He drove on quickly into another completely deserted lane behind the side street, stopped, switched off the engine, and turning to his wife, said "Let's get out."

Giulia got out without a word, and Marcello, having carefully locked the doors of the car, walked with her toward the street they had recently left. He felt completely calm now, completely detached and master of himself, just as he had desired to be during the whole of the day. He kept a careful watch on himself, however; and as he came out again into the crowded street and the joy of the throng exploded in his face its tumultuous rush of aggressive sincerity, he immediately asked, not without anxiety, whether this joy did not arouse in his mind some feeling that was far from serene. No, he thought, after a moment of careful self-examination, he felt neither regret, nor scorn, nor fear. He was truly calm, apathetic, dead, and he was ready to contemplate other people's joy without sharing in it but also without resenting it as a threat or an affront.

They started wandering about aimlessly among the crowd, from one group to another, from one side of the street to the other. Giulia was no longer frightened now and appeared, like him, to be quite calm and self-possessed; but this, he knew, was because of her good-natured capacity for identifying herself with other people's feelings. The crowd, instead of diminishing, seemed to increase each moment. It was a crowd, Marcello noticed almost wholly joyful, with a joy that was amazed and incredulous and awkward at expressing itself, and not yet quite sure that it would do so with impunity. More trucks, forcing their way with difficulty through the multitude, moved past laden with working-class people, both men and women, waving flags, some of them tricolor, some red. A small German open car went past, with two officers lolling quietly back in their seats and a soldier in battle dress sitting on the edge of the door holding a

Tommy gun: whistles and sneering cries rose from the pavements. Marcello noticed that there were numbers of soldiers about, very much at their ease and carrying no arms, but embracing each other, their stolid peasant faces lit up with a kind of inebriate hopefulness. The first time he saw two of these soldiers walking along with their arms round each other's waists like two lovers, their bayonets bouncing up and down against their unbuttoned tunics Marcello found they produced in him a feeling very much like scorn: they were men in uniform, and for him uniform meant, inexorably, decorum and dignity, whatever the feelings of its wearer might be. Giulia, as though guessing his thoughts, pointed at the two affectionate untidy soldiers and asked him, "Didn't they say the war was to continue?"

"They said so," answered Marcello, admitting himself suddenly, and with a painful effort of comprehension, to be in the wrong, "but it isn't true. . . Those poor fellows are quite right to be pleased: for them the war really is over."

In front of the great door of the Ministry to which Marcello had gone for his orders the day before he left for Paris, there was a great crowd of people protesting and shouting and waving their fists in the air. Those nearest the door were beating upon it with their hands and demanding that it should be opened. The name of the no-fallen Minister was being loudly repeated, in a tone of particular loathing and disgust, by many of those in the crowd. Marcello watched this concourse of people for some time without understanding what the demonstrators wanted. At last the door was very slightly opened and in the crack appeared a pale, imploring commissioner in a braided uniform. He said something to those nearest to him, somebody went in the door that was immediately closed again, the crowd yelled again for a little and then dispersed, but not entirely, for a few obstinate people remained, still knocking at the closed door and still shouting.

They left the Ministry and went on into the adjoining square. A shout of "Make way, make way!" caused the crowd to fall back and them with it. Stretching his hands

ough youths coming

a large bust of the

Dictator. The bust was bronze in color but was really of painted plaster, as one saw from a number of white chips raised by the violent way in which they bounced it over the paving stones. A little dark man, his face almost hidden behind a huge pair of tortoise-shell spectacles, looked at the bust and then turned toward Marcello and said nothing, in a sententious voice, "It looked like bronze but really it was just vulgar chalk." Marcello did not answer, and for a moment, craning his neck, he stared intently at the bust while it went bouncing heavily along in front of him. It was a bust like hundreds of other ones placed here and there in ministries and public offices—coarsely stylized, with jaw thrust out, eyes round and hollow, smooth, swollen cranium. He could not but reflect that mouth of sham bronze, image of another, living mouth once so arrogant, was now trailing in the dust amid the sneers and whistles of the same crowd that had once so warmly acclaimed it. Again Giulia seemed to guess his thoughts, for she murmured, "Just think, once upon a time a bust like that in a waiting room was all that was needed to make people lower their voices!"

He answered drily, "If they had him here now, in the flesh, they'd do the same to him as they're doing to the bust."

"D'you think they'll kill him?"

"Certainly, if they can."

They walked on a little farther, through the crowd that jostled and swirled in the darkness like turbulent, unmanageable flood-water. At one street corner a group of people had put up a long ladder at the corner of a building, and a man who had climbed to the top of the ladder was hammering vigorously at a stone that bore the name of the regime. Someone said with a laugh to Marcello, "There are Fascist signs everywhere . . . it'll take years to efface them all."

"It certainly will," said Marcello.

They crossed the square and made their way through the crowd to the arcade. It was almost in darkness, but by the dim light of the blacked-out lamps they came upon a

what it wanted. There was more curiosity than enthusiasm: just as people had previously assembled, as though to watch some spectacle, in order to see and hear the Dictator, so now they wanted to see and hear whoever it was who had overthrown the Dictator. As the car moved gently round the square, Giulia asked in a low voice, "Will the King really come out on the balcony?"

Before answering, Marcello twisted his head round to take a look at the balcony through the glass of the windshield. It was feebly illuminated by the reddish light of a couple of torches, and in between them they saw the closed window shutter. Then he replied, "I don't suppose so. . . Why should he?"

"Then what are all these people waiting for?"

"Nothing at all. . . It's just the habit of going into a piazza and calling for somebody."

Marcello circled very slowly round the square; it was as though he were politely pushing the reluctant groups of people out of his way with the fenders. Giulia said, quite unexpectedly, "D'you know, I feel almost disappointed?"

"Why?"

"I thought they'd be doing something or other—burning houses, killing people. . . When we came out I was afraid for you, and that was why I came. . . But there's nothing—nothing but yelling and clapping, Long live this and down with that, and singing and marching. . ."

Marcello could not refrain from answering, "The worst is yet to come."

"What d'you mean?" she demanded in a frightened voice. "For us, or for the others?"

"For us *and* for the others."

He immediately regretted having spoken when he felt Giulia seize his arm violently, in distress. "I knew all the time," she said, "that what you were telling me wasn't true—when you said that everything would come right. . . And now you're saying the same yourself."

"Don't be frightened. . . I was only just talking."

Giulia said no more; but she held tightly to his arm with both hands and pressed herself against him. Embarrassed, but unwilling to repel her, Marcello drove the car back through side streets toward the Corso. Once

in among the trees, whispered, "Come and let's make love here. . . . on the ground."

"No, really," Marcello could not help exclaiming, "here?"

"Yes, here," she said. "Why not? . . . Come, I want it, so as to feel reassured."

"Reassured about what?"

"Everyone thinks about war, and politics, and air raids—when they could really be so happy. . . . Come on. . . . Why, I'd do it right in the middle of one of their public squares," she added with sudden exasperation, "if only to show that I, at least, am capable of thinking about something else. . . . Come on."

She seemed now to be in a state of exaltation, and went in front of him into the thick darkness among the tree-trunks. "You see what a lovely bedroom," he heard her murmur. "Soon we shan't have a home at all . . . but this is a bedroom they can't ever take away from us. . . . We can sleep and make love here as often as we like." All of a sudden she vanished, as though she had sunk into the earth. Marcello looked about and then caught sight of her in the darkness, lying on the ground at the foot of a tree, one arm pillowing her head, the other raised toward him in silent invitation to lie down beside her. He did so, and no sooner was he there than Giulia twined her arms and legs tightly round him, kissing him all over his face with a blind, slow energy, as though she were seeking, on his brow and cheeks, other mouths through which she might penetrate into him. But almost at once her embrace slackened, and Marcello saw her half raise herself above him, gazing into the darkness. "Someone's coming," she said.

Marcello, too, sat up and looked. Through the trees, still some way off, the light of a pocket lamp swayed as it advanced and threw a feeble circular glimmer on the ground in front of it. There was no sound, for the thick carpet of dead leaves dulled the footsteps of the unknown person. The lamp advanced in their direction and Giulia quickly composed herself and sat up, throwing round her knees. Sitting side by side with

the tree, they watched the light approach. "It must be park-keeper," murmured Giulia.

The lamp was now shining on the ground at a short distance from them; then it was raised and its rays fell full upon them. Dazzled, they gazed at the dim, shadowy face of the man from whose fist the white light issued. The light, thought Marcello, would surely be lowered, once the park-keeper had taken a good look at them. But no, the light continued to shine full in their faces as the man stared at them in a silence that seemed, to Marcello, to be fraught with astonishment and speculation. "May I ask what you want with us?" he then demanded in a resentful tone.

"I don't want anything, Marcello," replied a gentle voice at once. At the same time the light was lowered and began to move away from them.

"Who is it?" murmured Giulia. "He seems to know you."

Marcello sat motionless, not daring to breathe, profoundly disturbed. Then he said to his wife, "Forgive me one moment. . . I'll be back at once." He jumped to his feet and pursued the unknown man.

He caught up with him at the edge of the garden, beside the pedestal of one of the white marble statues. There was a lamppost not far off, and as the man turned at the sound of his footsteps he recognized him immediately, even after all those years, by the smooth, ascetic face beneath his brushlike hair. He had seen him before in a close-fitting chauffeur's tunic; and now, too, he was wearing a uniform—black, buttoned up to the neck, with wide breeches and black leather gaiters. He held his cap under his arm and grasped the pocket lamp in his hand. He said at once, with a smile, "People who don't die always reappear."

The remark seemed to Marcello to be altogether too well suited to the circumstances, although it was meant as a joke and was perhaps unconscious. Breathless with agitation and with running, he said, "But I thought I'd . . . I thought I'd killed you."

"I hoped you knew that they'd saved me, Marcello," answered Lino quietly. "It's true that one paper and

nounced that I was dead, but it was a mistake. . . . Somebody else died in the hospital, in the bed next to mine. . . . And so you thought I was dead. . . . I said rightly, then: people who don't die always reappear."

It was not so much the rediscovery of Lino that now filled Marcello with horror as the familiar, conventional, although somber, tone that had at once been established between them. He said, unhappily, "My having believed you dead has had all sorts of consequences. And you weren't dead after all. . . ."

"For me too, Marcello, there were all sorts of consequences," said Lino, looking at him with a kind of compassion. "I thought it was a warning, and I got married. . . . Then my wife died. . . . And then," he added more slowly, "it all began over again. . . . Now I do night duty as a park-keeper. . . . These gardens are full of good-looking boys like you." He spoke these words with gentle, quiet effrontery, but without the slightest suggestion of a compliment. Marcello noticed, for the first time, that his hair was graying and that his face had become a little fatter. "And you're married," he went on. "That was your wife, wasn't it?"

Suddenly Marcello was unable to bear this subdued, dreary chatter any longer. Seizing hold of the man by the shoulders and shaking him, he said, "You talk to me as if nothing had happened. . . . D'you realize that you ruined my whole life?"

Without attempting to free himself, Lino replied, "Why d'you say that to me, Marcello? You're married, I dare say you've got children, you look as if you were comfortably off—what are you complaining of? It would have been worse if you had really killed me."

"But I," Marcello could not help exclaiming, "I, when I met you, was innocent . . . and since then I haven't been, ever again."

He saw Lino look at him in surprise. "But all of us, Marcello," he said, "all of us have been innocent. . . . Wasn't I innocent myself once? And we all lose our innocence, one way or another; it's the normal thing." He freed himself without difficulty from Marcello's already

relaxed grip, and added, in a knowing sort of way, "Look, here's your wife. . . We'd better leave each other."

"Marcello," called Giulia's voice in the darkness.

He turned and saw Giulia approaching in a hesitating manner. At the same moment Lino put on his cap, raised his hand in salute and hurried away in the direction of the museum. "Well, who was it?" asked Giulia.

"A schoolfriend of mine," replied Marcello. "who's ended up as a park-keeper."

"Let's go home," said she, taking his arm again.

"Don't you want to walk any more?"

"No. . . I'd rather go home."

They went to the car, drove away, and did not speak until they reached home. As he drove, Marcello thought again of Lino's words, so unconsciously significant. "We all lose our innocence, one way or another; it's the normal thing." Those words, he thought, held a concentrated judgment on his life. He had done what he had done in order to redeem himself from an imaginary crime; yet Lino's words had made him see, for the first time, that, even if he had not met him and had not fired at him and had not been convinced that he had killed him, even if, in fact, nothing had happened, he would still have done what he had done simply because, in any case, he would have had to lose his innocence and, consequently, would have desired to regain it. Normality was precisely this desire—as wearisome as it was vain—to justify a life trapped in its own original guilt, and it was not the deceptive mirage that he had pursued ever since the day of his meeting with Lino.

He heard Giulia's voice asking, "What time shall we leave tomorrow morning?" and he dismissed these thoughts as so many troublesome and now useless witnessings of his own error.

"As early as possible," he answered.

MARCELLO woke at dawn and saw, or thought he saw, his wife standing in the corner of the room near the window, looking out in the gray light of the first moment of day-break. She was completely naked. With one hand she held aside the curtain and with the other she covered her breast, but whether her gesture was one of modesty or of apprehension, it was impossible to say. A long lock of dark hair hung down her cheek; her face, bent forward, was pale and colorless and wore an expression of desolate thoughtfulness, of pensive dismay. Her body seemed during that night to have lost its look of robust, eager exuberance; her breasts, slightly flattened and relaxed by maternity showed in profile a flabby, tired crease that he had never noticed before; her belly seemed not so much rounded as swollen-looking, and gave an impression of clumsy, helpless heaviness, accentuated by the attitude of her thighs that were pressed together, as though trembling, to hide her groin. The cold light of awakening day, like an indiscreet but apathetic eye, fell dismally on this misery. As he looked at her, Marcello wondered what was passing through her mind as she gazed, motionless in that shaft of pale dawn light, at the deserted courtyard. And he said to himself, with a sharp feeling of compassion, that he could very well imagine what those thoughts might be. "Here am I," she was no doubt thinking, "here am I, driven out of my home before half my life is over, with a young child and a ruined husband who has nothing to hope from the future, whose fate is uncertain, whose very life may be in danger. This is what has come of all our efforts, of all our passion, of all our hopes." Truly, he thought, she was Eve driven out of Eden; and Eden was this home of theirs with all the modest things that it contained—the cupboards filled with their belongings, the cooking utensils, the drawing room for receiving friends, the plated spoons and forks, the sham Persian

carpets, the china that her mother had given her, the refrigerator, the vase of flowers in the hall, this double bedroom with its false Empire furniture bought by installments—and he himself, lying in the bed watching her. Her Eden also consisted, without doubt, in the pleasure of sitting at table twice a day with her family, of sleeping at night in the arms of her husband, of attending her household, of making plans for the future for herself, for her daughter and for him. And finally, Eden meant peace of soul, harmony with herself and with the world, the serenity of a heart composed and satisfied. From this Eden she was now driven out, forever, by a raging, pitiless angel armed with a flaming sword, who was thrusting her, naked and defenseless, into the hostile outer world.

Marcello watched her for some time, while she stood there motionless, absorbed in her melancholy contemplation; then, as sleep weighed heavy on his eyelids, he saw her leave the window, move on tiptoe to the hanging cupboard, take down a dressing gown, put it on and noiselessly leave the room. She was probably going to sit beside the bed of the sleeping child, for further painful contemplation, or perhaps to finish her preparations for departure. For a moment he thought of joining her, to comfort her in some way or other. But he was still heavy with sleep and he soon dropped off again.

Later, in the pure light of the summer morning, while they were driving towards Tagliacozzo, he thought again of that mournful vision, wondering whether he had dreamed it or had really seen it. His wife was sitting beside him, pressed close against him in order to make room for Lucilla, who was kneeling on the seat with her head out of the window, enjoying the drive. Giulia sat upright, her jacket unbuttoned over her white blouse, her face raised and shaded by the traveling hat she wore. Marcello noticed that she held on her knees an object of oblong shape done up in brown paper and tied with string. "What have you got in that parcel?" he asked in surprise.

"It'll make you laugh," she answered, "but I couldn't bear to leave that crystal vase that stood in the hall . . . I'm fond of it first of all because it's beautiful and then because it was you who gave it to me—do you remember?"

... short time after the child was born. . . . It's a weakness, I know, but never mind. . . . I'll put some flowers in it when we get to Tagliacozzo."

So it was really true, he thought; he hadn't dreamt it, it was really Giulia, in flesh and blood, not a dream figure that he had seen that morning standing by the window. He said, after a moment, "If you wanted to bring it away you did quite right. . . . But I assure you, we'll go home again at the proper time, as soon as the summer's over. You really mustn't be alarmed."

"I'm not alarmed."

"Everything will turn out for the best," went on Marcello, changing gear as the car started up a hill, "and then you'll be just as happy as you've been during these last years; or even more."

Giulia said nothing but did not appear convinced. Marcello, as he drove, glanced at her for a moment. With one hand she held the vase on her knee, while her other arm was round the waist of the child looking out of the window. All her affections, all her possessions, her attitudes seemed to declare, were now here, in this car: her husband on one side of her, her child on the other, and—symbol of family life—the crystal vase on her knee. He recalled that at the moment of leaving she had cast a last look at the front of the building and had said, "I wonder who will come and occupy our flat"; and he realized that he would never be able to persuade her because there was no reasoned conviction in her mind, merely the frightened sentiment of instinct. He asked her, however, in a calm voice, "Tell me what you're thinking now?"

"Nothing special," she replied, "I wasn't really thinking about anything. . . . I was looking at the landscape."

"No, I mean, what do you think in general?"

"In general? I think things are going badly for us, but that it's nobody's fault."

"Perhaps it's my fault."

"Why your fault? It's never anybody's fault. . . . Everybody's right and wrong at the same time. . . . Things go badly because they go badly, that's all." She spoke these words in an uncompromising tone, as if to show that she did not wish to talk any more. Marcello said nothing,

from that moment silence fell between them for some time.

It was still early, but there were already signs that the day would be hot. Already, in front of the car, between the hedges, dust-covered and shimmering with light, the air was quivering and the midsummer sun, beating down on the asphalt, made mirror-like reflections. The road wound through undulating country, among yellow hills of dry, shaggy stubble, with brown and gray farm buildings hidden here and there at the bottom of lonely, treeless valleys. Every now and then they met a horse-drawn cart or an old-fashioned car. It was an unfrequented road and not used by military traffic. Everything looked calm and normal, indifferent, thought Marcello as he drove along: one would never have thought oneself in the heart of a country that was both at war and in the middle of a revolution. The faces of the few peasants they saw, leaning against fences or digging in the fields, expressed nothing more than the usual feelings of stolid, quiet attention to the normal, everyday, obvious things of life. These people's thoughts were of harvests, of sun and rain, of food prices, or, indeed, of nothing at all. Giulia had been for years like these peasants, he said to himself; and now she was grieved at her peace being torn away from her. The thought even came into his mind: so much the worse for her. Living, for human beings, did not mean abandoning oneself to the peaceful torpor provided by the indulgence of nature; it meant, rather, a state of continuous struggle and agitation, it meant the solving, every moment, of some tiny problem within the limits of larger problems that were contained, in turn, in the all-embracing problem of life itself. This thought restored his self-confidence; and now the road was leaving the monotonous, desolate country and climbing up among the high red rocks of a chain of hills.

Owing, perhaps, to his feeling, as he drove the car, that his body was part and parcel of the machine that so resolutely and tirelessly faced and overcame the difficulties of the winding, hilly road, he became aware of a current of cold, adventurous optimism, the first he had known for many years, like a gust of rushing wind at last sweeping

away the clouds from the stormy sky of his spirit. Now indeed, he felt, he could consider a whole period of his life as finished and buried, now he could begin all over again, on a different plan and with different methods. His meeting with Lino, he felt, had been most valuable; not so much because it had freed him from remorse for a crime he had not committed as because Lino, with those few words he had happened to say about the inevitability and normality of the loss of innocence, had made him realize that for twenty years his feet had been obstinately set on a wrong road, that he must now unhesitatingly abandon. This time there would be no need for justification or for other people's support; and he was determined not to allow the crime he had really committed—the killing of Quadri—to poison his life with the torments of a vain search for purification and normality. What had happened had happened. Quadri was dead; and over that corpse he had lowered the stone slab of complete and final forgetfulness, heavier than any tombstone.

The landscape had changed now from the sultry desert they had passed through earlier, and an abundance of invisible water had brought into being, at the edges of the road, a profusion of grass and flowers and ferns and, higher up, along the tufa rock-ledges, the thick, exuberant foliage of small trees. This was the reason, perhaps, why Marcello felt that from now on for good and all, he would know how to avoid the desolation of those deserts in which man follows his own shadow and feels himself pursued and guilty; and would seek instead, freely and adventurously, places like the one he was now passing through, places that were rocky and pathless, fit for brigands and wild animals. He had bound himself, voluntarily, obstinately, stupidly, with unworthy ties and with obligations even more unworthy; all this he had done for the mirage of a normality that did not exist; but now those ties were broken, those obligations dissolved, and he was free again and would know how to make use of freedom. At that moment the landscape appeared at its most picturesque: on one side of the road the plantation of young trees covered the hillside; on the other a grassy slope, with a few huge, leafy oaks, fell away to a ravine

placed as though at random round the edges of the field.

Marcello looked carefully at this landscape as the car, twisting and turning down the steep road, descended rapidly toward the plain. The contrast between the ancient crag and the utterly modern airfield seemed to him significant, but his mind was suddenly distracted and he did not succeed in defining where, precisely, the significance lay. For at the same moment he became conscious of a strange feeling of familiarity, as though he had seen this landscape before. And yet he recollected that this was the first time he had ever traveled by that road.

They reached the bottom of the hill and started along the straight road that appeared so interminable. Marcello accelerated, and the pointer of the speedometer rose gradually to forty-five, then to fifty miles an hour. The road now ran between two wide expanses of mown fields, of a metallic yellow color and without a tree or a house. Evidently, thought Marcello, the local people all lived in the town and came down in the morning to work in the fields. In the evening they went back into the town again . . .

His attention was drawn away from these reflections by his wife's voice. "Look," she said, pointing to the airfield. "What's happening?"

Marcello looked and saw a number of people running over the great flat field, waving their arms. At the same time, looking all the more strange in the dazzling light of the summer sun, a tongue of flame—red, pointed, almost smokeless—blazed from the roof of one of the three hangers. Then another flame darted from the second roof and yet another from the third. Now the three flames seemed to be united in one single flame that moved violently, while clouds of black smoke rolled downward to the ground, hiding the hangers, spreading everywhere. All sign of life had meanwhile vanished and the airfield looked utterly deserted.

Marcello said calmly, "An air raid."

"Is there any danger?"

"No, they must have gone past already."

He accelerated, and the speedometer rose to sixty, to seventy-five miles an hour. They were right below the town now, and could see the road running round the

als, and when he held it to his nose it had a bitter, stinky smell. He reflected that this flower, that had grown in the shady tangle of the undergrowth, on the thin layer of earth that clung to the infertile tufa, had not sought to imitate taller, stronger plants nor to examine its own fate for the purpose of accepting or rejecting it. In full unconsciousness and freedom, it had grown where its seed had chanced to fall, until the day when his hand had gathered it. To be like that solitary flower, on a patch of moss in the dark undergrowth—that, he thought, was a fully humble and natural fate. On the other hand, the deliberate humility of seeking an impossible relationship with a normality which was in any case fallacious was merely a mask for inverted pride and self-esteem.

He started when he heard his wife's voice saying, "Come along, let's go on," and went back to his place at the wheel. The car moved swiftly along the curving road, climbing the slope where the scattered oak trees grew, and then, after passing through a thick wood, came out through a deep cleft in the hillside at a point where there was a view over an immense plain. The distant horizon, with its rim of blue mountains, was indistinct in the July ultriness. In the golden light, through the faint haze, farcello could see, in the middle of the plain, a solitary, precipitous crag, and on its top, like an acropolis, a little town consisting of a few houses clustering beneath the towers and walls of a castle. He could see distinctly the steep sides of the houses hanging sheer above the road that ran round the walls and continued, spirally, round and down the mountain; the castle was square in shape, with a squat, cylindrical tower at one side; the town was rose pink in color, and the blazing sunlight struck murderous sparks from the windows. At the foot of the crag the road ran in a white line, dead straight, towards the farthest limits of the plain; and opposite, on the farther side of the road, lay the wide, level, yellowish-green expanse of an airfield. In contrast with the ancient houses of the town, everything about the airfield looked new and modern—the three long hangers camouflaged in green and blue and brown, the mast at the top of which fluttered a red and white pennant, the numbers of silvery aircraft

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ills, the sides of the house, the castle. At the same moment, Marcello heard behind him the clamorous, furious roar of an airplane coming down low. In the midst of the noise he could distinguish the hail-like patter of machine-gun fire, and he realized that the plane was behind him and would soon be over him. He could tell from the sound of its engine that it was following the line of the road, straight and inflexible as the road itself. Soon the metallic roar was right overhead, deafening, just for the moment; and then it was further away again. He felt a violent blow on his shoulder, like a blow from a fist, and then a deathly languor came over him. He managed, desperately to summon all his strength and to steer the car to the side of the road and stop there. "Let's get out," he said faintly, putting his hand to the door and opening it.

The door flew open and Marcello fell out; then, he lay on his face and hands in the grass at the side of the road, he dragged his legs free of the car and lay on the ground near the ditch. But no one spoke, and no one appeared at the still open door of the car. At that moment, from far away, the roar of the airplane as it turned became loudly audible again. He said to himself, "Oh God, let them not be hit . . . they are innocent," and then he waited, resigned, face downward in the grass, for the plane to come back. The car, with its open door, was silent, and he had time to realize, with a sharp pang of pain, that no one would now get out of it. Then at last the plane was right above him; and it drew after it, as it preceded into the burning sky, a curtain of silence and darkness.

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